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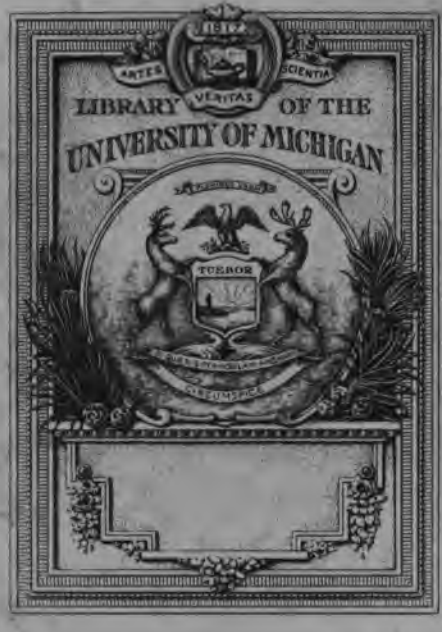
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[illegible] A. CONAN [illegible]

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They all looked at the long string of red-bedecked
riders

They all looked at the long string of red turbaned riders

Page 43

TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO AND THE GREEN FLAG

AND OTHER STORIES OF WAR AND SPORT

By A. CONAN DOYLE

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NEW YORK

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TO MY FRIEND

JAMES PAYN

IN TOKEN OF MY AFFECTION

AND ESTEEM

Lehin
Thomas
10·1·35
31000

PREFACE TO THE COLLECTED EDITION

I HAVE nothing to add to or subtract from this little book. It may be remarked, however, that events have moved so fast in the three years since it was written that the Dervish Power—which might have been a serious menace to civilisation—has been rolled back into Central Africa, and the rock of Abousir is now as safe to tourists as are the Pyramids.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

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THE TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO

THE TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO

CHAPTER I

THE public may possibly wonder why it is that they have never heard in the papers of the fate of the passengers of the *Korosko*. In these days of universal press agencies, responsive to the slightest stimulus, it may well seem incredible that an international incident of such importance should remain so long unchronicled. Suffice it that there were very valid reasons, both of a personal and political nature, for holding it back. The facts were well known to a good number of people at the time, and some version of them did actually appear in a provincial paper, but was generally discredited. They have now been thrown into narrative form, the incidents having been collated from the sworn statements of Colonel Cochrane Cochrane, of the Army and Navy Club, and from the letters of Miss Adams, of Boston, Mass. These have been supplemented by the evidence of Captain Archer, of the Egyptian Camel Corps, as given before the secret Government inquiry at Cairo. Mr. James Stephens has refused to put his version of the matter into writing, but as these proofs have been submitted to him, and no correction or deletion has been made in them, it may be supposed that he has not succeeded in detecting any grave misstatement of fact, and that any objection which he may

have to their publication depends rather upon private and personal scruples.

The *Korosko*, a turtle-bottomed, round-bowed stern-wheeler, with a 30-inch draught and the lines of a flat-iron, started upon the 13th of February, in the year 1895, from Shellal, at the head of the first cataract, bound for Wady Halfa. I have a passenger card for the trip, which I hereby produce:

S. W. "KOROSKO," FEBRUARY 13TH.

PASSENGERS.

Colonel Cochrane Cochrane . . .	London.
Mr. Cecil Brown	London.
John H. Headingly	Boston, U.S.A.
Miss Adams	Boston, U.S.A.
Miss S. Adams	Worcester, Mass., U.S.A
Mons. Fardet	Paris.
Mr. and Mrs. Belmont	Dublin.
James Stephens	Manchester.
Rev. John Stuart	Birmingham.
Mrs. Shlesinger, nurse and child . .	Florence.

This was the party as it started from Shellal with the intention of travelling up the two hundred miles of Nubian Nile which lie between the first and the second cataract.

It is a singular country, this Nubia. Varying in breadth from a few miles to as many yards (for the name is only applied to the narrow portion which is capable of cultivation), it extends in a thin, green, palm-fringed strip upon either side of the broad coffee-coloured river. Beyond it there stretches on the Libyan bank a savage and illimitable desert, extending to the whole breadth of Africa. On the other side an equally desolate

wilderness is bounded only by the distant Red Sea. Between these two huge and barren expanses Nubia writhes like a green sand-worm along the course of the river. Here and there it disappears altogether, and the Nile runs between black and sun-cracked hills, with the orange drift-sand lying like glaciers in their valleys. Everywhere one sees traces of vanished races and submerged civilisations. Grotesque graves dot the hills or stand up against the sky-line: pyramidal graves, tumulus graves, rock graves,—everywhere, graves. And, occasionally, as the boat rounds a rocky point, one sees a deserted city up above,—houses, walls, battlements, with the sun shining through the empty window squares. Sometimes you learn that it has been Roman, sometimes Egyptian, sometimes all record of its name or origin has been absolutely lost. You ask yourself in amazement why any race should build in so uncouth a solitude, and you find it difficult to accept the theory that this has only been of value as a guard-house to the richer country down below, and that these frequent cities have been so many fortresses to hold off the wild and predatory men of the south. But whatever be their explanation, be it a fierce neighbour, or be it a climatic change, there they stand, these grim and silent cities, and up on the hills you can see the graves of their people, like the port-holes of a man-of-war. It is through this weird, dead country that the tourists smoke and gossip and flirt as they pass up to the Egyptian frontier.

The passengers of the *Korosko* formed a merry party, for most of them had travelled up together from Cairo to Assouan, and even Anglo-Saxon ice

thaws rapidly upon the Nile. They were fortunate in being without the single disagreeable person who in these small boats is sufficient to mar the enjoyment of the whole party. On a vessel which is little more than a large steam launch, the bore, the cynic, or the grumbler holds the company at his mercy. But the *Korosko* was free from anything of the kind. Colonel Cochrane Cochrane was one of those officers whom the British Government, acting upon a large system of averages, declares at a certain age to be incapable of further service, and who demonstrate the worth of such a system by spending their declining years in exploring Morocco, or shooting lions in Somaliland. He was a dark, straight, aquiline man, with a courteously deferential manner, but a steady, questioning eye; very neat in his dress and precise in his habits, a gentleman to the tips of his trim finger-nails. In his Anglo-Saxon dislike to effusiveness he had cultivated a self-contained manner which was apt at first acquaintance to be repellant, and he seemed to those who really knew him to be at some pains to conceal the kind heart and human emotions which influenced his actions. It was respect rather than affection which he inspired among his fellow-travellers, for they felt, like all who had ever met him, that he was a man with whom acquaintance was unlikely to ripen into a friendship, though a friendship when once attained would be an unchanging and inseparable part of himself. He wore a grizzled military moustache, but his hair was singularly black for a man of his years. He made no allusion in his conversation to the numerous campaigns in which he had distinguished himself, and the reason usually given for his reticence

was that they dated back to such early Victorian days that he had to sacrifice his military glory at the shrine of his perennial youth.

Mr. Cecil Brown—to take the names in the chance order in which they appear upon the passenger list—was a young diplomatist from a Continental Embassy, a man slightly tainted with the Oxford manner, and erring upon the side of unnatural and inhuman refinement, but full of interesting talk and cultured thought. He had a sad, handsome face, a small wax-tipped moustache, a low voice and a listless manner, which was relieved by a charming habit of suddenly lighting up into a rapid smile and gleam when anything caught his fancy. An acquired cynicism was eternally crushing and overlying his natural youthful enthusiasms, and he ignored what was obvious while expressing keen appreciation for what seemed to the average man to be either trivial or unhealthy. He chose Walter Pater for his travelling author, and sat all day, reserved but affable, under the awning, with his novel and his sketch-book upon a camp-stool beside him. His personal dignity prevented him from making advances to others, but if they chose to address him, they found him a courteous and amiable companion.

The Americans formed a group by themselves. John H. Headingly was a New Englander, a graduate of Harvard, who was completing his education by a tour round the world. He stood for the best type of young American,—quick, observant, serious, eager for knowledge, and fairly free from prejudice, with a fine ballast of unsectarian but earnest religious feeling, which held him steady amid all the sudden gusts of youth. He had less of the

appearance and more of the reality of culture than the young Oxford diplomatist, for he had keener emotions though less exact knowledge. Miss Adams and Miss Sadie Adams were aunt and niece, the former a little, energetic, hard-featured Bostonian old-maid, with a huge surplus of unused love behind her stern and swarthy features. She had never been from home before, and she was now busy upon the self-imposed task of bringing the East up to the standard of Massachusetts. She had hardly landed in Egypt before she realised that the country needed putting to rights, and since the conviction struck her she had been very fully occupied. The saddle-galled donkeys, the starved pariah dogs, the flies round the eyes of the babies, the naked children, the importunate begging, the ragged, untidy women,—they were all challenges to her conscience, and she plunged in bravely at her work of reformation. As she could not speak a word of the language, however, and was unable to make any of the delinquents understand what it was that she wanted, her passage up the Nile left the immemorial East very much as she had found it, but afforded a good deal of sympathetic amusement to her fellow-travellers. No one enjoyed her efforts more than her niece, Sadie, who shared with Mrs. Belmont the distinction of being the most popular person upon the boat. She was very young,—fresh from Smith College,—and she still possessed many both of the virtues and of the faults of a child. She had the frankness, the trusting confidence, the innocent straightforwardness, the high spirits, and also the loquacity and the want of reverence. But even her faults caused amusement, and if she had preserved many of the

characteristics of a clever child, she was none the less a tall and handsome woman, who looked older than her years on account of that low curve of the hair over the ears, and that fulness of bodice and skirt which Mr. Gibson has either initiated or imitated. The whisk of those skirts, and the frank incisive voice and pleasant, catching laugh were familiar and welcome sounds on board of the *Korosko*. Even the rigid Colonel softened into geniality, and the Oxford-bred diplomatist forgot to be unnatural with Miss Sadie Adams as a companion.

The other passengers may be dismissed more briefly. Some were interesting, some neutral, and all amiable. Monsieur Fardet was a good-natured but argumentative Frenchman, who held the most decided views as to the deep machinations of Great Britain and the illegality of her position in Egypt. Mr. Belmont was an iron-grey, sturdy Irishman, famous as an astonishingly good long-range rifle-shot, who had carried off nearly every prize which Wimbledon or Bisley had to offer. With him was his wife, a very charming and refined woman, full of the pleasant playfulness of her country. Mrs. Shlesinger was a middle-aged widow, quiet and soothing, with her thoughts all taken up by her six-year-old child, as a mother's thoughts are likely to be in a boat which has an open rail for a bulwark. The Reverend John Stuart was a Non-conformist minister from Birmingham,—either a Presbyterian or a Congregationalist,—a man of immense stoutness, slow and torpid in his ways, but blessed with a considerable fund of homely humour, which made him, I am told, a very favourite preacher and an effective speaker from advanced radical platforms.

Finally, there was Mr. James Stephens, a Man-

chester solicitor (junior partner of Hickson, Ward, and Stephens), who was travelling to shake off the effects of an attack of influenza. Stephens was a man who, in the course of thirty years, had worked himself up from cleaning the firm's windows to managing its business. For most of that long time he had been absolutely immersed in dry, technical work, living with the one idea of satisfying old clients and attracting new ones, until his mind and soul had become as formal and precise as the laws which he expounded. A fine and sensitive nature was in danger of being as warped as a busy city man's is liable to become. His work had become an engrained habit, and, being a bachelor, he had hardly an interest in life to draw him away from it, so that his soul was being gradually bricked up like the body of a mediæval nun. But at last there came this kindly illness, and Nature hustled James Stephens out of his groove, and sent him into the broad world far away from roaring Manchester and his shelves full of calf-skin authorities. At first he resented it deeply. Everything seemed trivial to him compared to his own petty routine. But gradually his eyes were opened, and he began dimly to see that it was his work which was trivial when compared to this wonderful, varied, inexplicable world of which he was so ignorant. Vaguely he realised that the interruption to his career might be more important than the career itself. All sorts of new interests took possession of him; and the middle-aged lawyer developed an after-glow of that youth which had been wasted among his books. His character was too formed to admit of his being anything but dry and precise in his ways, and a trifle pedantic in his mode of speech; but he read

and thought and observed, scoring his "Baedeker" with underlinings and annotations as he had once done his "Prideaux's Commentaries." He had travelled up from Cairo with the party, and had contracted a friendship with Miss Adams and her niece. The young American girl, with her chatter, her audacity, and her constant flow of high spirits, amused and interested him, and she in turn felt a mixture of respect and of pity for his knowledge and his limitations. So they became good friends, and people smiled to see his clouded face and her sunny one bending over the same guide-book.

The little *Korosko* puffed and spluttered her way up the river, kicking up the white water behind her, and making more noise and fuss over her five knots an hour than an Atlantic liner on a record voyage. On deck, under the thick awning, sat her little family of passengers, and every few hours she eased down and sidled up to the bank to allow them to visit one more of that innumerable succession of temples. The remains, however, grow more modern as one ascends from Cairo, and travellers who have sated themselves at Gizeh and Sakara with the contemplation of the very oldest buildings which the hands of man have constructed, become impatient of temples which are hardly older than the Christian era. Ruins which would be gazed upon with wonder and veneration in any other country are hardly noticed in Egypt. The tourists viewed with languid interest the half-Greek art of the Nubian bas-reliefs; they climbed the hill of Korosko to see the sun rise over the savage Eastern desert; they were moved to wonder by the great shrine of Abou-Simbel, where some old race has hollowed out a mountain as if it were a

cheese; and, finally, upon the evening of the fourth day of their travels they arrived at Wady Halfa, the frontier garrison town, some few hours after they were due, on account of a small mishap in the engine-room. The next morning was to be devoted to an expedition to the famous rock of Abousir, from which a great view may be obtained of the second cataract. At eight-thirty, as the passengers sat on deck after dinner, Mansoor, the dragoman, half Copt half Syrian, came forward, according to the nightly custom, to announce the programme for the morrow.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, plunging boldly into the rapid but broken stream of his English, "to-morrow you will remember not to forget to rise when the gong strikes you for to compress the journey before twelve o'clock. Having arrived at the place where the donkeys expect us, we shall ride five miles over the desert, passing a very fine temple of Ammon-ra which dates itself from the eighteenth dynasty upon the way, and so reach the celebrated pulpit rock of Abousir. The pulpit rock is supposed to have been called so because it is a rock like a pulpit. When you have reached it you will know that you are on the very edge of civilisation, and that very little more will take you into the country of the Dervishes, which will be obvious to you at the top. Having passed the summit, you will perceive the full extremity of the second cataract, embracing wild natural beauties of the most dreadful variety. Here all very famous people carve their names,—and so you will carve your names also." Mansoor waited expectantly for a titter, and bowed to it when it arrived. "You will then return to Wady Halfa, and there remain

two hours to suspect the Camel Corps, including the grooming of the beasts, and the bazaar before returning, so I wish you a very happy good-night."

There was a gleam of his white teeth in the lamplight, and then his long, dark petticoats, his short English cover-coat, and his red tarboosh vanished successively down the ladder. The low buzz of conversation which had been suspended by his coming broke out anew.

"I'm relying on you, Mr. Stephens, to tell me all about Abousir," said Miss Sadie Adams. "I do like to know what I am looking at right there at the time, and not six hours afterward in my state-room. I haven't got Abou-Simbel and the wall pictures straight in my mind yet, though I saw them yesterday."

"I never hope to keep up with it," said her aunt. "When I am safe back in Commonwealth Avenue, and there's no dragoman to hustle me around, I'll have time to read about it all, and then I expect I shall begin to enthuse and want to come right back again. But it's just too good of you, Mr. Stephens, to try and keep us informed."

"I thought that you might wish precise information, and so I prepared a small digest of the matter," said Stephens, handing a slip of paper to Miss Sadie. She looked at it in the light of the deck lamp, and broke into her low, hearty laugh.

"*Re* Abousir," she read; "now, what *do* you mean by '*re*,' Mr. Stephens? You put '*re* Rameses the Second' on the last paper you gave me."

"It is a habit I have acquired, Miss Sadie," said Stephens; "it is the custom in the legal profession when they make a memo."

"Make what, Mr. Stephens?"

"A memo—a memorandum, you know. We put *re* so-and-so to show what it is about."

"I suppose it's a good short way," said Miss Sadie, "but it feels queer somehow when applied to scenery or to dead Egyptian kings. '*Re* Cheops,'—doesn't that strike you as funny?"

"No, I can't say that it does," said Stephens.

"I wonder if it is true that the English have less humour than the Americans, or whether it's just another kind of humour," said the girl. She had a quiet, abstracted way of talking as if she were thinking aloud. "I used to imagine they had less, and yet, when you come to think of it, Dickens and Thackeray and Barrie, and so many other of the humourists we admire most, are Britishers. Besides, I never in all my days heard people laughed so hard as in that London theatre. There was a man behind us, and every time he laughed auntie looked round to see if a door had opened, he made such a draught. But you have some funny expressions, Mr. Stephens!"

"What else strikes you as funny, Miss Sadie?"

"Well, when you sent me the temple ticket and the little map, you began your letter, 'Enclosed, please find,' and then at the bottom, in brackets, you had '2 enclo.'"

"That is the usual form in business."

"Yes, in business," said Sadie, demurely, and there was a silence.

"There's one thing I wish," remarked Miss Adams, in the hard, metallic voice with which she disguised her softness of heart, "and that is, that I could see the Legislature of this country and lay a few cold-drawn facts in front of them, I'd make a platform of my own, Mr. Stephens, and run a

party on my ticket. A Bill for the compulsory use of eyewash would be one of my planks, and another would be for the abolition of those Yashmak veil things which turn a woman into a bale of cotton goods with a pair of eyes looking out of it."

"I never could think why they wore them," said Sadie; "until one day I saw one with her veil lifted. Then I knew."

"They make me tired, those women," cried Miss Adams, wrathfully. "One might as well try to preach duty and decency and cleanliness to a line of bolsters. Why, good land, it was only yesterday at Abou-Simbel, Mr. Stephens, I was passing one of their houses,—if you can call a mud-pie like that a house,—and I saw two of the children at the door with the usual crust of flies round their eyes, and great holes in their poor little blue gowns! So I got off my donkey, and I turned up my sleeves, and I washed their faces well with my handkerchief, and sewed up the rents,—for in this country I would as soon think of going ashore without my needle-case as without my white umbrella, Mr. Stephens. Then as I warmed on the job I got into the room,—such a room!—and I packed the folks out of it, and I fairly did the chores as if I had been the hired help. I've seen no more of that temple of Abou-Simbel than if I had never left Boston; but, my sakes, I saw more dust and mess than you would think they could crowd into a house the size of a Newport bathing-hut. From the time I pinned up my skirt until I came out, with my face the colour of that smoke-stack, wasn't more than an hour, or maybe an hour and a half, but I had that house as clean and fresh as a new pine-wood box. I had a *New York*

Herald with me, and I lined their shelf with paper for them. Well, Mr. Stephens, when I had done washing my hands outside, I came past the door again, and there were those two children sitting on the stoop with their eyes full of flies, and all just the same as ever, except that each had a little paper cap made out of the *New York Herald* upon his head. But, say, Sadie, it's going on to ten o'clock, and to-morrow an early excursion."

"It's just too beautiful, this purple sky and the great silver stars," said Sadie. "Look at the silent desert and the black shadows of the hills. It's grand, but it's terrible, too; and then when you think that we really *are*, as that dragoman said just now, on the very end of civilisation, and with nothing but savagery and bloodshed down there where the Southern Cross is twinkling so prettily, why, it's like standing on the beautiful edge of a live volcano."

"Shucks, Sadie, don't talk like that, child," said the older woman, nervously. "It's enough to scare any one to listen to you."

"Well, but don't you feel it yourself, Auntie? Look at that great desert stretching away and away until it is lost in the shadows. Hear the sad whisper of the wind across it! It's just the most solemn thing that ever I saw in my life."

"I'm glad we've found something that will make you solemn, my dear," said her aunt. "I've sometimes thought—— Sakes alive, what's that?"

From somewhere amongst the hill shadows upon the other side of the river there had risen a high shrill whimpering, rising and swelling, to end in a long weary wail.

"It's only a jackal, Miss Adams," said Stephens.

"I heard one when we went out to see the Sphinx by moonlight."

But the American lady had risen, and her face showed that her nerves had been ruffled.

"If I had my time over again I wouldn't have come past Assouan," said she. "I can't think what possessed me to bring you all the way up here, Sadie. Your mother will think that I am clean crazy, and I'd never dare to look her in the eye if anything went wrong with us. I've seen all I want to see of this river, and all I ask now is to be back at Cairo again."

"Why, Auntie," cried the girl, "it isn't like you to be faint-hearted."

"Well, I don't know how it is, Sadie, but I feel a bit unstrung, and that beast caterwauling over yonder was just more than I could put up with. There's one consolation, we are scheduled to be on our way home to-morrow, after we've seen this one rock or temple, or whatever it is. I'm full up of rocks and temples, Mr. Stephens. I shouldn't mope if I never saw another. Come, Sadie! Good-night!"

"Good-night! Good-night, Miss Adams!" and the two ladies passed down to their cabins.

Monsieur Fardet was chatting, in a subdued voice, with Headingly, the young Harvard graduate, bending forward confidentially between the whiffs of his cigarette.

"Dervishes, Mister Headingly!" said he, speaking excellent English, but separating his syllables as a Frenchman will. "There are no Dervishes. They do not exist."

"Why, I thought the woods were full of them," said the American.

Monsieur Fardet glanced across to where the red core of Colonel Cochrane's cigar was glowing through the darkness.

"You are an American, and you do not like the English," he whispered. "It is perfectly comprehended upon the Continent that the Americans are opposed to the English."

"Well," said Headingly, with his slow, deliberate manner, "I won't say that we have not our tiffs, and there are some of our people—mostly of Irish stock—who are always mad with England; but the most of us have a kindly thought for the mother country. You see, they may be aggravating folk sometimes, but after all they are our *own* folk, and we can't wipe that off the slate."

"*Eh bien!*" said the Frenchman. "At least I can say to you what I could not without offence say to these others. And I repeat that there *are* no Dervishes. They were an invention of Lord Cromer in the year 1885."

"You don't say!" cried Headingly.

"It is well known in Paris, and has been exposed in *La Patrie* and other of our so well-informed papers."

"But this is colossal," said Headingly. "Do you mean to tell me, Monsieur Fardet, that the siege of Khartoum and the death of Gordon and the rest of it was just one great bluff?"

"I will not deny that there was an emeute, but it was local, you understand, and now long forgotten. Since then there has been profound peace in the Soudan."

"But I have heard of raids, Monsieur Fardet, and I've read of battles, too, when the Arabs tried to invade Egypt. It was only two days ago that

we passed Toski, where the dragoman said there had been a fight. Is that all bluff also?"

"Pah, my friend, you do not know the English. You look at them as you see them with their pipes and their contented faces, and you say, 'Now, these are good, simple folk who will never hurt any one.' But all the time they are thinking and watching and planning. 'Here is Egypt weak,' they cry. '*Allons!*' and down they swoop like a gull upon a crust. 'You have no right there,' says the world. 'Come out of it!' But England has already begun to tidy everything, just like the good Miss Adams when she forces her way into the house of an Arab. 'Come out,' says the world. 'Certainly,' says England; 'just wait one little minute until I have made everything nice and proper.' So the world waits for a year or so, and then it says once again, 'Come out.' 'Just wait a little,' says England; 'there is trouble at Khartoum, and when I have set that all right I shall be very glad to come out.' So they wait until it is all over, and then again they say, 'Come out.' 'How can I come out,' says England, 'when there are still raids and battles going on? If we were to leave, Egypt would be run over.' 'But there are no raids,' says the world. 'Oh, are there not?' says England, and then within a week sure enough the papers are full of some new raid of Dervishes. We are not all blind, Mister Headingly. We understand very well how such things can be done. A few Bedouins, a little backsheesh, some blank cartridges, and, behold—a raid!"

"Well, well," said the American, "I'm glad to know the rights of this business, for it has often puzzled me. But what does England get out of it?"

"She gets the country, monsieur."

"I see. You mean, for example, that there is a favourable tariff for British goods?"

"No, monsieur; it is the same for all."

"Well, then, she gives the contracts to Britishers?"

"Precisely, monsieur."

"For example, the railroad that they are building right through the country, the one that runs alongside the river, that would be a valuable contract for the British?"

Monsieur Fardet was an honest man, if an imaginative one.

"It is a French company, monsieur, which holds the railway contract," said he.

The American was puzzled.

"They don't seem to get much for their trouble," said he. "Still, of course, there must be some indirect pull somewhere. For example Egypt no doubt has to pay and keep all those redcoats in Cairo."

"Egypt, monsieur! No, they are paid by England."

"Well, I suppose they know their own business best, but they seem to me to take a great deal of trouble, and to get mighty little in exchange. If they don't mind keeping order and guarding the frontier, with a constant war against the Dervishes on their hands, I don't know why any one should object. I suppose no one denies that the prosperity of the country has increased enormously since they came. The revenue returns show that. They tell me, also, that the poorer folks have justice, which they never had before."

"What are they doing here at all?" cried the

Frenchman, angrily. "Let them go back to their island. We cannot have them all over the world."

"Well, certainly, to us Americans who live all in our own land it does seem strange how you European nations are for ever slopping over into some other country which was not meant for you. It's easy for us to talk, of course, for we have still got room and to spare for all our people. When we start pushing each other over the edge we shall have to start annexing also. But at present just here in North Africa there is Italy in Abyssinia, and England in Egypt, and France in Algiers——"

"France!" cried Monsieur Fardet. "Algiers belongs to France. You laugh, monsieur. I have the honour to wish you a very good-night." He rose from his seat, and walked off, rigid with outraged patriotism, to his cabin.

CHAPTER II

THE young American hesitated for a little, debating in his mind whether he should not go down and post up the daily record of his impressions which he kept for his home-staying sister. But the cigars of Colonel Cochrane and of Cecil Brown were still twinkling in the far corner of the deck, and the student was acquisitive in the search of information. He did not quite know how to lead up to the matter, but the Colonel very soon did it for him.

"Come on, Headingly," said he, pushing a camp-stool in his direction. "This is the place for an antidote. I see that Fardet has been pouring politics into your ear."

"I can always recognise the confidential stoop of his shoulders when he discusses *la haute politique*," said the dandy diplomatist. "But what a sacrilege upon a night like this! What a nocturne in blue and silver might be suggested by that moon rising above the desert. There is a movement in one of Mendelssohn's songs which seems to embody it all,—a sense of vastness, of repetition, the cry of the wind over an interminable expanse. The subtler emotions which cannot be translated into words are still to be hinted at by chords and harmonies."

"It seems wilder and more savage than ever to-night," remarked the American. "It gives me the same feeling of pitiless force that the Atlantic does upon a cold, dark, winter day. Perhaps it is the

knowledge that we are right there on the very edge of any kind of law and order. How far do you suppose that we are from any Dervishes, Colonel Cochrane?"

"Well, on the Arabian side," said the Colonel, "we have the Egyptian fortified camp of Sarras about forty miles to the south of us. Beyond that are sixty miles of very wild country before you would come to the Dervish post at Akasheh. On this other side, however, there is nothing between us and them."

"Abousir is on this side, is it not?"

"Yes. That is why the excursion to the Abousir Rock has been forbidden for the last year. But things are quieter now."

"What is to prevent them from coming down on that side?"

"Absolutely nothing," said Cecil Brown, in his listless voice.

"Nothing, except their fears. The coming, of course, would be absolutely simple. The difficulty would lie in the return. They might find it hard to get back if their camels were spent and the Halfa garrison with their beasts fresh got on their track. They know it as well as we do, and it has kept them from trying."

"It isn't safe to reckon upon a Dervish's fears," remarked Brown. "We must always bear in mind that they are not amenable to the same motives as other people. Many of them are anxious to meet death, and all of them are absolute, uncompromising believers in destiny. They exist as a *reductio ad absurdum* of all bigotry,—a proof of how surely it leads toward blank barbarism."

"You think these people are a real menace to

Egypt?" asked the American. "There seems from what I have heard to be some difference of opinion about it. Monsieur Fardet, for example, does not seem to think that the danger is a very pressing one."

"I am not a rich man," Colonel Cochrane answered, after a little pause, "but I am prepared to lay all I am worth that within three years of the British officers being withdrawn, the Dervishes would be upon the Mediterranean. Where would the civilisation of Egypt be? where would the hundreds of millions be which have been invested in this country? where the monuments which all nations look upon as most precious memorials of the past?"

"Come now, Colonel," cried Headingly, laughing, "surely you don't mean that they would shift the pyramids?"

"You cannot foretell what they would do. There is no iconoclast in the world like an extreme Mohammedan. Last time they overran this country they burned the Alexandrian library. You know that all representations of the human features are against the letter of the Koran. A statue is always an irreligious object in their eyes. What do these fellows care for the sentiment of Europe? The more they could offend it the more delighted they would be. Down would go the Sphinx, the Colossi, the Statues of Abou-Simbel, —as the saints went down in England before Cromwell's troopers."

"Well now," said Headingly, in his slow, thoughtful fashion, "suppose I grant you that the Dervishes could overrun Egypt, and suppose also that you English are holding them out, what I'm never

done asking is, what reason have you for spending all these millions of dollars and the lives of so many of your men? What do you get out of it, more than France gets, or Germany, or any other country, that runs no risk and never lays out a cent?"

"There are a good many Englishmen who are asking themselves that question," remarked Cecil Brown. "It's my opinion that we have been the policemen of the world long enough. We policed the seas for pirates and slavers. Now we police the land for Dervishes and brigands and every sort of danger to civilisation. There is never a mad priest or a witch doctor, or a firebrand of any sort on this planet, who does not report his appearance by sniping the nearest British officer. One tires of it at last. If a Kurd breaks loose in Asia Minor, the world wants to know why Great Britain does not keep him in order. If there is a military mutiny in Egypt, or a Jehad in the Soudan, it is still Great Britain who has to set it right. And all to an accompaniment of curses such as the policeman gets when he seizes a ruffian among his pals. We get hard knocks and no thanks, and why should we do it? Let Europe do its own dirty work."

"Well," said Colonel Cochrane, crossing his legs and leaning forward with the decision of a man who has definite opinions, "I don't at all agree with you, Brown, and I think that to advocate such a course is to take a very limited view of our national duties. I think that behind national interests and diplomacy and all that there lies a great guiding force, —a Providence, in fact,—which is for ever getting the best out of each nation and using it for the good of the whole. When a nation ceases to respond, it is time that she went into hospital for a

few centuries, like Spain or Greece,—the virtue has gone out of her. A man or a nation is not here upon this earth merely to do what is pleasant and profitable. It is often called upon to carry out what is unpleasant and unprofitable; but if it is obviously right, it is mere shirking not to undertake it."

Headingly nodded approvingly.

"Each has its own mission. Germany is predominant in abstract thought; France in literature, art, and grace. But we and you,—for the English-speakers are all in the same boat, however much the *New York Sun* may scream over it,—we and you have among our best men a higher conception of moral sense and public duty than is to be found in any other people. Now, these are the two qualities which are needed for directing a weaker race. You can't help them by abstract thought or by graceful art, but only by that moral sense which will hold the scales of Justice even, and keep itself free from every taint of corruption. That is how we rule India. We came there by a kind of natural law, like air rushing into a vacuum. All over the world, against our direct interests and our deliberate intentions, we are drawn into the same thing. And it will happen to you also. The pressure of destiny will force you to administer the whole of America from Mexico to the Horn."

Headingly whistled.

"Our Jingoes would be pleased to hear you, Colonel Cochrane," said he. "They'd vote you into our Senate and make you one of the Committee on Foreign Relations."

"The world is small, and it grows smaller every day. It's a single organic body, and one spot of

gangrene is enough to vitiate the whole. There's no room upon it for dishonest, defaulting, tyrannical, irresponsible Governments. As long as they exist they will always be centres of trouble and of danger. But there are many races which appear to be so incapable of improvement that we can never hope to get a good Government out of them. What is to be done, then? The former device of Providence in such a case was extermination by some more virile stock. An Attila or a Tamerlane pruned off the weaker branch. Now, we have a more merciful substitution of rulers, or even of mere advice from a more advanced race. That is the case with the Central Asian Khanates and with the protected States of India. If the work has to be done, and if we are the best fitted for the work, then I think that it would be a cowardice and a crime to shirk it."

"But who is to decide whether it is a fitting case for your interference?" objected the American. "A predatory country could grab every other land in the world upon such a pretext."

"Events—inexorable, inevitable events—will decide it. Take this Egyptian business as an example. In 1881 there was nothing in this world further from the minds of our people than any interference with Egypt; and yet 1882 left us in possession of the country. There was never any choice in the chain of events. A massacre in the streets of Alexandria, and the mounting of guns to drive out our fleet—which was there, you understand, in fulfilment of solemn treaty obligations—led to the bombardment. The bombardment led to a landing to save the city from destruction. The landing caused an extension of operations—and here we

are, with the country upon our hands. At the time of trouble we begged and implored the French or any one else to come and help us to set the thing to rights, but they all deserted us when there was work to be done, though they are ready enough to scold and to impede us now. When we tried to get out of it, up came this wild Dervish movement, and we had to sit tighter than ever. We never wanted the task; but, now that it has come, we must put it through in a workmanlike manner. We've brought justice into the country, and purity of administration, and protection for the poor man. It has made more advance in the last twelve years than since the Moslem invasion in the seventh century. Except the pay of a couple of hundred men, who spend their money in the country, England has neither directly nor indirectly made a shilling out of it, and I don't believe you will find in history a more successful and more disinterested bit of work."

Headingly puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"There is a house near ours, down on the Back Bay at Boston, which just ruins the whole prospect," said he. "It has old chairs littered about the stoop, and the shingles are loose, and the garden runs wild; but I don't know that the neighbours are exactly justified in rushing in, and stamping around, and running the thing on their own lines."

"Not if it were on fire?" asked the Colonel.

Headingly laughed, and rose from his campstool.

"Well, it doesn't come within the provisions of the Monroe Doctrine, Colonel," said he. "I'm beginning to think that modern Egypt is every bit as

interesting as ancient, and that Rameses the Second wasn't the last live man in the country."

The two Englishmen rose and yawned.

"Yes, it's a whimsical freak of fortune which has sent men from a little island in the Atlantic to administer the land of the Pharaohs. We shall pass away and never leave a trace among the successive races who have held the country, for it is an Anglo-Saxon custom to write their deeds upon rocks. I dare say that the remains of a Cairo drainage system will be our most permanent record, unless they prove a thousand years hence that it was the work of the Hyksos kings," remarked Cecil Brown. "But here is the shore party come back."

Down below they could hear the mellow Irish accents of Mrs. Belmont and the deep voice of her husband, the iron-grey rifle-shot. Mr. Stuart, the fat Birmingham clergyman, was thrashing out a question of piastres with a noisy donkey-boy, and the others were joining in with chaff and advice. Then the hubbub died away, the party from above came down the ladder, there were "good-nights," the shutting of doors, and the little steamer lay silent, dark, and motionless in the shadow of the high Halfa bank. And beyond this one point of civilisation and of comfort there lay the limitless, savage, unchangeable desert, straw-coloured and dream-like in the moonlight, mottled over with the black shadows of the hills.

CHAPTER III

"STOPPA! Backa!" cried the native pilot to the European engineer.

The bluff bows of the stern-wheeler had squelched into the soft brown mud, and the current had swept the boat alongside the bank. The long gangway was thrown across, and the six tall soldiers of the Soudanese escort filed along it, their light-blue, gold-trimmed zouave uniforms and their jaunty yellow and red forage caps showing up bravely in the clear morning light. Above them, on the top of the bank, was ranged the line of donkeys, and the air was full of the clamour of the boys. In shrill, strident voices each was crying out the virtues of his own beast, and abusing that of his neighbour.

Colonel Cochrane and Mr. Belmont stood together in the bows, each wearing the broad white puggareed hat of the tourist. Miss Adams and her niece leaned against the rail beside them.

"Sorry your wife isn't coming, Belmont," said the Colonel.

"I think she had a touch of the sun yesterday. Her head aches very badly."

His voice was strong and thick like his figure.

"I should stay to keep her company, Mr. Belmont," said the little American old maid; "but I learn that Mrs. Shlesinger finds the ride too long for her, and has some letters which she must mail to-day, so Mrs. Belmont will not be lonesome."

"You're very good, Miss Adams. We shall be back, you know, by two o'clock."

"Is that certain?"

"It must be certain, for we are taking no lunch with us, and we shall be famished by then."

"Yes, I expect we shall be ready for a hock and seltzer, at any rate," said the Colonel. "This desert dust gives a flavour to the worst wine."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen!" cried Mansoor, the dragoman, moving forward with something of the priest in his flowing garments and smooth, clean-shaven face. "We must start early that we we may return before the meridial heat of the weather." He ran his dark eyes over the little group of his tourists with a paternal expression. "You take your green glasses, Miss Adams, for glare very great out in the desert. Ah, Mr. Stuart, I set aside very fine donkey for you,—prize donkey, sir, always put aside for the gentleman of most weight. Never mind to take your monument ticket to-day. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if *you* please!"

Like a grotesque frieze the party moved one by one along the plank gangway and up the brown crumbling bank. Mr. Stephens led them, a thin, dry, serious figure, in an English straw hat. His red "Baedeker" gleamed under his arm, and in one hand he held a little paper of notes, as if it were a brief. He took Miss Sadie by one arm and her aunt by the other as they toiled up the bank, and the young girl's laughter rang frank and clear in the morning air as "Baedeker" came fluttering down at their feet. Mr. Belmont and Colonel Cochrane followed, the brims of their sun-hats touching as they discussed the relative advantages

of the Mauser, the Lebel, and the Lee-Metford. Behind them walked Cecil Brown, listless, cynical, self-contained. The fat clergyman puffed slowly up the bank, with many gasping witticisms at his own defects. "I'm one of those men who carry everything before them," said he, glancing ruefully at his rotundity, and chuckling wheezily at his own little joke. Last of all came Headingly, slight and tall, with the student stoop about his shoulders, and Fardet, the good-natured, fussy, argumentative Parisian.

"You see we have an escort to-day," he whispered to his companion.

"So I observed."

"Pah!" cried the Frenchman, throwing out his arms in derision; "as well have an escort from Paris to Versailles. This is all part of the play, Monsieur Headingly. It deceives no one, but it is part of the play. *Pourquoi ces drôles de militaires, dragoman, hein?*"

It was the dragoman's *rôle* to be all things to all men, so he looked cautiously round before he answered to make sure that the English were mounted and out of earshot.

"*C'est ridicule, monsieur!*" said he, shrugging his fat shoulders. "*Mais que voulez-vous? C'est l'ordre officiel Egyptien.*"

"*Egyptien! Pah, Anglais, Anglais—toujours Anglais!*" cried the angry Frenchman.

The frieze now was more grotesque than ever, but had changed suddenly to an equestrian one, sharply outlined against the deep-blue Egyptian sky. Those who have never ridden before have to ride in Egypt, and when the donkeys break into a canter, and the Nile Irregulars are at full charge,

such a scene of flying veils, clutching hands, huddled swaying figures, and anxious faces is nowhere to be seen. Belmont, his square figure balanced upon a small white donkey, was waving his hat to his wife, who had come out upon the saloon-deck of the *Korosko*. Cochrane sat very erect with a stiff military seat, hands low, head high, and heels down, while beside him rode the young Oxford man, looking about him with drooping eyelids as if he thought the desert hardly respectable, and had his doubts about the Universe. Behind them the whole party was strung along the bank in varying stages of jolting and discomfort, a brown-faced, noisy donkey-boy running after each donkey. Looking back, they could see the little lead-coloured stern-wheeler, with the gleam of Mrs. Belmont's handkerchief from the deck. Beyond ran the broad, brown river, winding down in long curves to where, five miles off, the square, white block-houses upon the black, ragged hills marked the outskirts of Wady Halfa, which had been their starting-point that morning.

"Isn't it just too lovely for anything?" cried Sadie, joyously. "I've got a donkey that runs on castors, and the saddle is just elegant. Did you ever see anything so cunning as these beads and things round his neck? You must make a memo. *re* donkey, Mr. Stephens. Isn't that correct legal English?"

Stephens looked at the pretty, animated, boyish face looking up at him from under the coquettish straw hat, and he wished that he had the courage to tell her in her own language that she was just too sweet for anything. But he feared above all things lest he should offend her, and so put an end

to their present pleasant intimacy. So his compliment dwindled into a smile.

"You look very happy," said he.

"Well, who could help feeling good with this dry, clear air, and the blue sky and the crisp, yellow sand, and a superb donkey to carry you. I've just got everything in the world to make me happy."

"Everything?"

"Well, everything that I have any use for just now."

"I suppose you never know what it is to be sad?"

"Oh, when I *am* miserable I am just too miserable for words. I've sat and cried for days and days at Smith's College, and the other girls were just crazy to know what I was crying about, and guessing what the reason was that I wouldn't tell, when all the time the real true reason was that I didn't know myself. You know how it comes like a great dark shadow over you, and you don't know why or wherefore, but you've just got to settle down to it and be miserable."

"But you never had any real cause?"

"No, Mr. Stephens, I've had such a good time all my life, that I don't think, when I look back, that I ever had any real cause for sorrow."

"Well, Miss Sadie, I hope with all my heart that you will be able to say the same when you are the same age as your aunt. Surely I hear her calling!"

"I wish, Mr. Stephens, you would strike my donkey-boy with your whip if he hits the donkey again," cried Miss Adams, jogging up on a high, raw-boned beast. "Hi, dragoman, Mansoor, you

tell this boy that I won't have the animals ill used, and that he ought to be ashamed of himself. Yes, you little rascal, you ought! He's grinning at me like an advertisement for a tooth paste. Do you think, Mr. Stephens, that if I were to knit that black soldier a pair of woollen stockings he would be allowed to wear them? The poor creature has bandages round his legs."

"Those are his putties, Miss Adams," said Colonel Cochrane, looking back at her. "We have found in India that they are the best support to the leg in marching. They are very much better than any stocking."

"Well, you don't say! They remind me mostly of a sick horse. But it's elegant to have the soldiers with us, though Monsieur Fardet tells me there's nothing for us to be scared about."

"That is only my opinion, Miss Adams," said the Frenchman, hastily. "It may be that Colonel Cochrane thinks otherwise."

"It is Monsieur Fardet's opinion against that of the officers who have the responsibility of caring for the safety of the frontier," said the Colonel, coldly. "At least we will all agree that they have the effect of making the scene very much more picturesque."

The desert upon their right lay in long curves of sand, like the dunes which might have fringed some forgotten primeval sea. Topping them they could see the black, craggy summits of the curious volcanic hills which rise upon the Libyan side. On the crest of the low sand-hills they would catch a glimpse every now and then of a tall, sky-blue soldier, walking swiftly, his rifle at the trail. For a moment the lank, warlike figure would be sharply

silhouetted against the sky. Then he would dip into a hollow and disappear, while some hundred yards off another would show for an instant and vanish.

"Wherever are they raised?" asked Sadie, watching the moving figures. "They look to me just about the same tint as the hotel boys in the States."

"I thought some question might arise about them," said Mr. Stephens, who was never so happy as when he could anticipate some wish of the pretty American. "I made one or two references this morning in the ship's library. Here it is—*re*—that's to say, about black soldiers. I have it on my notes that they are from the 10th Soudanese battalion of the Egyptian army. They are recruited from the Dinkas and the Shilluks—two negroid tribes living to the south of the Dervish country, near the Equator."

"How can the recruits come through the Dervishes, then?" asked Headingly, sharply.

"I dare say there is no such very great difficulty over that," said Monsieur Fardet, with a wink at the American.

"The older men are the remains of the old black battalions. Some of them served with Gordon at Khartoum and have his medal to show. The others are many of them deserters from the Mahdi's army," said the Colonel.

"Well, so long as they are not wanted, they look right elegant in those blue jackets," Miss Adams observed. "But if there was any trouble, I guess we would wish they were less ornamental and a bit whiter."

"I am not so sure of that, Miss Adams," said the

Colonel. "I have seen these fellows in the field, and I assure you that I have the utmost confidence in their steadiness."

"Well, I'll take your word without trying," said Miss Adams, with a decision which made every one smile.

So far their road had lain along the side of the river, which was swirling down upon their left hand deep and strong from the cataracts above. Here and there the rush of the current was broken by a black shining boulder over which the foam was spouting. Higher up they could see the white gleam of the rapids, and the banks grew into rugged cliffs, which were capped by a peculiar, outstanding, semicircular rock. It did not require the dragoman's aid to tell the party that this was the famous landmark to which they were bound. A long, level stretch lay before them, and the donkeys took it at a canter. At the farther side were scattered rocks, black upon orange; and in the midst of them rose some broken shafts of pillars and a length of engraved wall, looking in its greyness and its solidity more like some work of Nature than of man. The fat, sleek dragoman had dismounted, and stood waiting in his petticoats and his cover-coat for the stragglers to gather round him.

"This temple, ladies and gentlemen," he cried, with the air of an auctioneer who is about to sell it to the highest bidder, "very fine example from the eighteenth dynasty. Here is the cartouche of Thotmes the Third," he pointed up with his donkey-whip at the rude, but deep, hieroglyphics upon the wall above him. "He live sixteen hundred years before Christ, and this is made to remember

his victorious exhibition into Mesopotamia. Here we have his history from the time that he was with his mother, until he return with captives tied to his chariot. In this you see him crowned with Lower Egypt, and with Upper Egypt offering up sacrifice in honour of his victory to the God Ammon-ra. Here he bring his captives before him, and he cut off each his right hand. In this corner you see little pile—all right hands."

"My sakes, I shouldn't have liked to be here in those days," said Miss Adams.

"Why, there's nothing altered," remarked Cecil Brown. "The East is still the East. I've no doubt that within a hundred miles, or perhaps a good deal less, from where you stand——"

"Shut up!" whispered the Colonel, and the party shuffled on down the line of the wall with their faces up and their big hats thrown backward. The sun behind them struck the old grey masonry with a brassy glare, and carried on to it the strange black shadows of the tourists, mixing them up with the grim, high-nosed, square-shouldered warriors, and the grotesque, rigid deities who lined it. The broad shadow of the Reverend John Stuart, of Birmingham, smudged out both the heathen King and the god whom he worshipped.

"What's this?" he was asking in his wheezy voice, pointing up with a yellow Assouan cane.

"That is a hippopotamus," said the dragoman; and the tourists all tittered, for there was just a suspicion of Mr. Stuart himself in the carving.

"But it isn't bigger than a little pig," he protested. "You see that the King is putting his spear through it with ease."

"They make it small to show that it was a very

small thing to the King," said the dragoman. "So you see that all the King's prisoners do not exceed his knee—which is not because he was so much taller, but so much more powerful. You see that he is bigger than his horse, because he is a king and the other is only a horse. The same way, these small women whom you see here and there are just his trivial little wives."

"Well, now!" cried Miss Adams, indignantly. "If they had sculped that King's soul it would have needed a lens to see it. Fancy his allowing his wives to be put in like that."

"If he did it now, Miss Adams," said the Frenchman, "he would have more fighting than ever in Mesopotamia. But time brings revenge. Perhaps the day will soon come when we have the picture of the big, strong wife and the trivial little husband —*hein?*"

Cecil Brown and Headingly had dropped behind, for the glib comments of the dragoman, and the empty, light-hearted chatter of the tourists jarred upon their sense of solemnity. They stood in silence watching the grotesque procession, with its sun-hats and green veils, as it passed in the vivid sunshine down the front of the old grey wall. Above them two crested hoopoes were fluttering and calling amid the ruins of the pylon.

"Isn't it a sacrilege?" said the Oxford man, at last.

"Well, now, I'm glad you feel that about it, because it's how it always strikes me," Headingly answered, with feeling. "I'm not quite clear in my own mind how these things should be approached,—if they are to be approached at all,—but I am sure this is not the way. On the whole,

I prefer the ruins that I have not seen to those which I have."

The young diplomatist looked up with his peculiarly bright smile, which faded away too soon into his languid, *blasé* mask.

"I've got a map," said the American, "and sometimes far away from anything in the very midst of the waterless, trackless desert, I see 'ruins' marked upon it—or 'remains of a temple,' perhaps. For example, the temple of Jupiter Ammon, which was one of the most considerable shrines in the world, was hundreds of miles from anywhere. Those are the ruins, solitary, unseen, unchanging through the centuries, which appeal to one's imagination. But when I present a check at the door, and go in as if it were Barnum's show, all the subtle feeling of romance goes right out of it."

"Absolutely!" said Cecil Brown, looking over the desert with his dark, intolerant eyes. "If one could come wandering here alone—stumble upon it by chance, as it were—and find one's self in absolute solitude in the dim light of the temple, with these grotesque figures all around, it would be perfectly overwhelming. A man would be prostrated with wonder and awe. But when Belmont is puffing his bulldog pipe, and Stuart is wheezing, and Miss Sadie Adams is laughing——"

"And that jay of a dragoman speaking his piece," said Headingly; "I want to stand and think all the time, and I never seem to get the chance. I was ripe for manslaughter when I stood before the Great Pyramid, and couldn't get a quiet moment because they would boost me on to the top. I took a kick at one man which would have sent *him* to the top in one jump if I had hit meat.

But fancy travelling all the way from America to see the pyramid, and then finding nothing better to do than to kick an Arab in front of it!"

The Oxford man laughed in his gentle, tired fashion.

"They are starting again," said he, and the two hastened forward to take their places at the tail of the absurd procession.

Their route ran now among large, scattered boulders, and between stony, shingly hills. A narrow, winding path curved in and out amongst the rocks. Behind them their view was cut off by similar hills, black and fantastic, like the slag-heaps at the shaft of a mine. A silence fell upon the little company, and even Sadie's bright face reflected the harshness of Nature. The escort had closed in, and marched beside them, their boots scrunching among the loose black rubble. Colonel Cochrane and Belmont were still riding together in the van.

"Do you know, Belmont," said the Colonel, in a low voice, "you may think me a fool, but I don't like this one little bit."

Belmont gave a short gruff laugh.

"It seemed all right in the saloon of the *Korosko*, but now that we are here we *do* seem rather up in the air," said he. "Still, you know, a party comes here every week, and nothing has ever yet gone wrong."

"I don't mind taking my chances when I am on the war-path," the Colonel answered. "That's all straightforward and in the way of business. But when you have women with you, and a helpless crowd like this, it becomes really dreadful. Of course, the chances are a hundred to one that we have no trouble; but if we should have—well, it

spoutings of foam. On the other side was a frightful wilderness of black, scattered rocks, which were the *débris* carried down by the river at high flood. In no direction were there any signs of human beings or their dwellings.

"On the far side," said the dragoman, waving his donkey-whip toward the east, "is the military line which conducts Wady Halfa to Sarras. Sarras lies to the south, under that black hill. Those two blue mountains which you see very far away are in Dongola, more than a hundred miles from Sarras. The railway there is forty miles long, and has been much annoyed by the Dervishes, who are very glad to turn the rails into spears. The telegraph wires are also much appreciated thereby. Now, if you will kindly turn round, I will explain, also, what we see upon the other side."

It was a view which, when once seen, must always haunt the mind. Such an expanse of savage and unrelieved desert might be part of some cold and burned-out planet rather than of this fertile and bountiful earth. Away and away it stretched to die into a soft, violet haze in the extremest distance. In the foreground the sand was of a bright golden yellow, which was quite dazzling in the sunshine. Here and there in a scattered cordon stood the six trusty negro soldiers leaning motionless upon their rifles, and each throwing a shadow which looked as solid as himself. But beyond this golden plain lay a low line of those black slag-heaps, with yellow sand-valleys winding between them. These in their turn were topped by higher and more fantastic hills, and these by others, peeping over each other's shoulders until they blended with that distant violet haze. None of these hills

had come to the end of the path which curves up the hill that the dragoman called a halt.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, we are arrived for the so famous pulpit rock of Abousir. From the summit you will presently enjoy a panorama of remarkable fertility. But first you will observe that over the rocky side of the hill are everywhere cut the names of great men who have passed it in their travels, and some of these names are older than the time of Christ."

"Got Moses?" asked Miss Adams.

"Auntie, I'm surprised at you!" cried Sadie.

"Well, my dear, he was in Egypt, and he was a great man, and he may have passed this way."

"Moses's name very likely there, and the same with Herodotus," said the dragoman, gravely. "Both have been long worn away. But there on the brown rock you will see Belzoni. And up higher is Gordon. There is hardly a name famous in the Soudan which you will not find, if you like. And now, with your permission, we shall take good-bye of our donkeys and walk up the path, and you will see the river and the desert from the summit of the top."

A minute or two of climbing brought them out upon the semicircular platform which crowns the rock. Below them on the far side was a perpendicular black cliff, a hundred and fifty feet high, with the swirling, foam-streaked river roaring past its base. The swish of the water and the low roar as it surged over the mid-stream boulders boomed through the hot, stagnant air. Far up and far down they could see the course of the river, a quarter of a mile in breadth, and running very deep and strong, with sleek black eddies and occasional

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were of any height,—a few hundred feet at the most,—but their savage, saw-toothed crests and their steep scarps of sun-baked stone gave them a fierce character of their own.

"The Libyan desert," said the dragoman, with a proud wave of his hand. "The greatest desert in the world. Suppose you travel right west from here, and turn neither to the north nor to the south, the first houses you would come to would be in America. That make you homesick, Miss Adams, I believe?"

But the American old maid had her attention drawn away by the conduct of Sadie, who had caught her arm by one hand and was pointing over the desert with the other.

"Well, now, if that isn't too picturesque for anything!" she cried, with a flush of excitement upon her pretty face. "Do look, Mr. Stephens! That's just the one only thing we wanted to make it just perfectly grand. See the men upon the camels coming out from between those hills!"

They all looked at the long string of red-turbaned riders who were winding out of the ravine, and there fell such a hush that the buzzing of the flies sounded quite loud upon their ears. Colonel Cochrane had lit a match, and he stood with it in one hand and the unlit cigarette in the other until the flame licked round his fingers. Belmont whistled. The dragoman stood staring with his mouth half-open, and a curious slaty tint in his full, red lips. The others looked from one to the other with an uneasy sense that there was something wrong. It was the Colonel who broke the silence.

"By George, Belmont, I believe the hundred-to-one chance has come off!" said he.

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT's the meaning of this, Mansoor?" cried Belmont, harshly. "Who are these people, and why are you standing staring as if you had lost your senses?"

The dragoman made an effort to compose himself, and licked his dry lips before he answered.

"I do not know who they are," said he, in a quavering voice. "I did not expect to see any Arabs in this part."

"Who they are?" cried the Frenchman. "You can see who they are. They are armed men upon camels, Ababdeh, Bishareen—Bedouins, in short, such as are employed by the Government upon the frontier."

"By Jove, he may be right, Cochrane," said Belmont, looking inquiringly at the Colonel. "Why shouldn't it be as he says? why shouldn't these fellows be friendlies?"

"There are no friendlies upon this side of the river," said the Colonel, abruptly; "I am perfectly certain about that. There is no use in mincing matters. We must prepare for the worst."

But in spite of his words, they stood stock-still, in a huddled group, staring out over the plain. Their nerves were numbed by the sudden shock, and to all of them it was like a scene in a dream, vague, impersonal, and unreal. The men upon the camels had streamed out from a gorge which lay a mile or so distant on the side of the path

along which they had travelled. Their retreat, therefore, was entirely cut off. It appeared, from the dust and the length of the line, to be quite an army which was emerging from the hills, for seventy men upon camels cover a considerable stretch of ground. Having reached the sandy plain, they very deliberately formed to the front, and then at the harsh call of a bugle they trotted forward in line, the parti-coloured figures all swaying and the sand smoking in a rolling yellow cloud at the heels of their camels. At the same moment the six black soldiers doubled in from the front with their Martinis at the trail, and snuggled down like well-trained skirmishers behind the rocks upon the haunch of the hill. Their breech-blocks all snapped together as their corporal gave them the order to load.

And now suddenly the first stupor of the excursionists passed away, and was succeeded by a frantic and impotent energy. They all ran about upon the plateau of rock in an aimless, foolish flurry, like frightened fowls in a yard. They could not bring themselves to acknowledge that there was no possible escape for them. Again and again they rushed to the edge of the great cliff which rose from the river, but the youngest and most daring of them could never have descended it. The two women clung one on each side of the trembling Mansoor, with a feeling that he was officially responsible for their safety. When he ran up and down in his desperation, his skirts and theirs all fluttered together. Stephens, the lawyer, kept close to Sadie Adams, muttering mechanically, "Don't be alarmed, Miss Sadie. Don't be at all alarmed!" though his own limbs were twitching with agitation. Monsieur

Fardet stamped about with a guttural rolling of r's, glancing angrily at his companions, as if they had in some way betrayed him, while the fat clergyman stood with his umbrella up, staring stolidly with big, frightened eyes at the camel-men. Cecil Brown curled his small, prim moustache, and looked white but contemptuous. The Colonel, Belmont, and the young Harvard graduate were the three most cool-headed and resourceful members of the party.

"Better stick together," said the Colonel. "There's no escape for us, so we may as well remain united."

"They've halted," said Belmont. "They are reconnoitring us. They know very well that there is no escape from them, and they are taking their time. I don't see what we can do."

"Suppose we hide the women," Headingly suggested. "They can't know how many of us are here. When they have taken us, the women can come out of their hiding-place and make their way back to the boat."

"Admirable!" cried Colonel Cochrane. "Admirable! This way, please, Miss Adams. Bring the ladies here, Mansoor. There is not an instant to be lost."

There was a part of the plateau which was invisible from the plain, and here in feverish haste they built a little cairn. Many flaky slabs of stone were lying about, and it did not take long to prop the largest of these against a rock, so as to make a lean-to, and then to put two side-pieces to complete it. The slabs were of the same colour as the rock, so that to a casual glance the hiding-place was not very visible. The two ladies were squeezed into this, and they crouched together, Sadie's arms

thrown round her aunt. When they had walled them up, the men turned with lighter hearts to see what was going on. As they did so there rang out the sharp, peremptory crack of a rifle-shot from the escort, followed by another and another, but these isolated shots were drowned in the long, spattering roll of an irregular volley from the plain, and the air was full of the phit-phit-phit of the bullets. The tourists all huddled behind the rocks, with the exception of the Frenchman, who still stamped angrily about, striking his sun-hat with his clenched hand. Belmont and Cochrane crawled down to where the Soudanese soldiers were firing slowly and steadily, resting their rifles upon the boulders in front of them.

The Arabs had halted about five hundred yards away, and it was evident from their leisurely movements that they were perfectly aware that there was no possible escape for the travellers. They had paused to ascertain their number before closing in upon them. Most of them were firing from the backs of their camels, but a few had dismounted and were kneeling here and there,—little shimmering white spots against the golden background. Their shots came sometimes singly in quick, sharp throbs, and sometimes in a rolling volley, with a sound like a boy's stick drawn across iron railings. The hill buzzed like a bee-hive, and the bullets made a sharp, crackling sound as they struck against the rocks.

"You do no good by exposing yourself," said Belmont, drawing Colonel Cochrane behind a large jagged boulder, which already furnished a shelter for three of the Soudanese.

"A bullet is the best we have to hope for," said

Cochrane, grimly. "What an infernal fool I have been, Belmont, not to protest more energetically against this ridiculous expedition! I deserve whatever I get, but it *is* hard on these poor souls who never knew the danger."

"I suppose there's no help for us?"

"Not the faintest."

"Don't you think this firing might bring the troops up from Halfa?"

"They'll never hear it. It is a good six miles from here to the steamer. From that to Halfa would be another five."

"Well, when we don't return, the steamer will give the alarm."

"And where shall we be by that time?"

"My poor Norah! My poor little Norah!" muttered Belmont, in the depths of his grizzled moustache.

"What do you suppose that they will do with us, Cochrane?" he asked after a pause.

"They may cut our throats, or they may take us as slaves to Khartoum. I don't know that there is much to choose. There's one of us out of his troubles, anyhow."

The soldier next them had sat down abruptly, and leaned forward over his knees. His movement and attitude were so natural that it was hard to realise that he had been shot through the head. He neither stirred nor groaned. His comrades bent over him for a moment, and then, shrugging their shoulders, they turned their dark faces to the Arabs once more. Belmont picked up the dead man's Martini and his ammunition-pouch.

"Only three more rounds, Cochrane," said he, with the little brass cylinders upon the palm of his

hand. "We've let them shoot too soon, and too often. We should have waited for the rush."

"You're a famous shot, Belmont," cried the Colonel. "I've heard of you as one of the cracks. Don't you think you could pick off their leader?"

"Which is he?"

"As far as I can make out, it is that one on the white camel on their right front. I mean the fellow who is peering at us from under his two hands."

Belmont thrust in his cartridge and altered the sights. "It's a shocking bad light for judging distance," said he. "This is where the low point-blank trajectory of the Lee-Metford comes in useful. Well, we'll try him at five hundred." He fired, but there was no change in the white camel or the peering rider.

"Did you see any sand fly?"

"No; I saw nothing."

"I fancy I took my sight a trifle too full."

"Try him again."

Man and rifle and rock were equally steady, but again the camel and chief remained unharmed. The third shot must have been nearer, for he moved a few paces to the right, as if he were becoming restless. Belmont threw the empty rifle down with an exclamation of disgust.

"It's this confounded light," he cried, and his cheeks flushed with annoyance. "Think of my wasting three cartridges in that fashion! If I had him at Bisley I'd shoot the turban off him, but this vibrating glare means refraction. What's the matter with the Frenchman?"

Monsieur Fardet was stamping about the plateau with the gestures of a man who has been stung by

a wasp. "*S'cré nom! S'cré nom!*" he shouted, showing his strong white teeth under his black waxed moustache. He wrung his right hand violently, and as he did so he sent a little spray of blood from his finger-tips. A bullet had chipped his wrist. Headingly ran out from the cover where he had been crouching, with the intention of dragging the demented Frenchman into a place of safety, but he had not taken three paces before he was himself hit in the loins, and fell with a dreadful crash among the stones. He staggered to his feet, and then fell again in the same place, floundering up and down like a horse which has broken its back. "I'm done!" he whispered, as the Colonel ran to his aid, and then he lay still, with his china-white cheek against the black stones. When, but a year before, he had wandered under the elms of Cambridge, surely the last fate upon this earth which he could have predicted for himself would be that he should be slain by the bullet of a fanatical Mohammedan in the wilds of the Libyan desert.

Meanwhile the fire of the escort had ceased, for they had shot away their last cartridge. A second man had been killed, and a third—who was the corporal in charge—had received a bullet in his thigh. He sat upon a stone, tying up his injury with a grave, preoccupied look upon his wrinkled black face, like an old woman piecing together a broken plate. The three others fastened their bayonets with a determined metallic rasp and snap, and the air of men who intended to sell their lives dearly.

"They're coming!" cried Belmont, looking over the plain.

"Let them come!" the Colonel answered, putting his hands into his trouser-pockets. Suddenly he pulled one fist out, and shook it furiously in the air. "Oh, the cads! the confounded cads!" he shouted, and his eyes were congested with rage.

It was the fate of the poor donkey-boys which had carried the self-contained soldier out of his usual calm. During the firing they had remained huddled, a pitiable group, among the rocks at the base of the hill. Now upon the conviction that the charge of the Dervishes must come first upon them, they had sprung upon their animals with shrill, inarticulate cries of fear, and had galloped off across the plain. A small flanking-party of eight or ten camel-men had worked round while the firing had been going on, and these dashed in among the flying donkey-boys, hacking and hewing with a cold-blooded, deliberate ferocity. One little boy, in a flapping Galabeeah, kept ahead of his pursuers for a time, but the long stride of the camels ran him down, and an Arab thrust his spear into the middle of his stooping back. The small, white-clad corpses looked like a flock of sheep trailing over the desert.

But the people upon the rock had no time to think of the cruel fate of the donkey-boys. Even the Colonel, after that first indignant outburst, had forgotten all about them. The advancing camel-men had trotted to the bottom of the hill, had dismounted, and, leaving their camels kneeling, had rushed furiously onward. Fifty of them were clambering up the path and over the rocks together, their red turbans appearing and vanishing again as they scrambled over the boulders. Without a shot or a pause they surged over the three

black soldiers, killing one and stamping the other two down under their hurrying feet. So they burst on to the plateau at the top, where an unexpected resistance checked them for an instant.

The travellers, nestling up against one another, had awaited, each after his own fashion, the coming of the Arabs. The Colonel, with his hands back in his trouser-pockets, tried to whistle out of his dry lips. Belmont folded his arms and leaned against a rock, with a sulky frown upon his lowering face. So strangely do our minds act that his three successive misses and the tarnish to his reputation as a marksman was troubling him more than his impending fate. Cecil Brown stood erect, and plucked nervously at the upturned points of his little prim moustache. Monsieur Fardet groaned over his wounded wrist. Mr. Stephens, in sombre impotence, shook his head slowly, the living embodiment of prosaic law and order. Mr. Stuart stood, his umbrella still over him, with no expression upon his heavy face or in his staring brown eyes. Headingly lay with that china-white cheek resting motionless upon the stones. His sun-hat had fallen off, and he looked quite boyish with his ruffled yellow hair and his unlined, clean-cut face. The dragoman sat upon a stone and played nervously with his donkey-whip. So the Arabs found them when they reached the summit of the hill.

And then, just as the foremost rushed to lay hands upon them, a most unexpected incident arrested them. From the time of the first appearance of the Dervishes the fat clergyman of Birmingham had looked like a man in a cataleptic trance. He had neither moved nor spoken. But now he suddenly woke at a bound into strenuous

and heroic energy. It may have been the mania of fear, or it may have been the blood of some Berserk ancestor which stirred suddenly in his veins; but he broke into a wild shout, and, catching up a stick, he struck right and left among the Arabs with a fury which was more savage than their own. One who helped to draw up this narrative has left it upon record that of all the pictures which have been burned into his brain, there is none so clear as that of this man, his large face shining with perspiration, and his great body dancing about with unwieldy agility, as he struck at the shrinking, snarling savages. Then a spear-head flashed from behind a rock with a quick, vicious upward thrust, the clergyman fell upon his hands and knees, and the horde poured over him to seize their unresisting victims. Knives glimmered before their eyes, rude hands clutched at their wrists and at their throats, and then, with brutal and unreasoning violence, they were hauled and pushed down the steep, winding path to where the camels were waiting below. The Frenchman waved his unwounded hand as he walked. "*Vive le Khalifa! Vive le Mahdi!*" he shouted, until a blow from behind with the butt-end of a Remington beat him into silence.

And now they were herded in at the base of the Abousir Rock, this little group of modern types who had fallen into the rough clutch of the seventh century,—for in all save the rifles in their hands there was nothing to distinguish these men from the desert warriors who first carried the crescent flag out of Arabia. The East does not change, and the Dervish raiders were not less brave, less cruel, or less fanatical than their forebears. They

stood in a circle, leaning upon their guns and spears, and looking with exultant eyes at the dishevelled group of captives. They were clad in some approach to a uniform, red turbans gathered around the neck as well as the head, so that the fierce face looked out of a scarlet frame; yellow, untanned shoes, and white tunics with square, brown patches let into them. All carried rifles, and one had a small, discoloured bugle slung over his shoulder. Half of them were negroes—fine, muscular men, with the limbs of a jet Hercules; and the other half were Baggara Arabs — small, brown, and wiry, with little, vicious eyes, and thin, cruel lips. The chief was also a Baggara, but he was a taller man than the others, with a black beard which came down over his chest, and a pair of hard, cold eyes, which gleamed like glass from under his thick, black brows. They were fixed now upon his captives, and his features were grave with thought. Mr. Stuart had been brought down, his hat gone, his face still flushed with anger, and his trousers sticking in one part to his leg. The two surviving Soudanese soldiers, their black faces and blue coats blotched with crimson, stood silently at attention upon one side of this forlorn group of castaways.

The chief stood for some minutes, stroking his black beard, while his fierce eyes glanced from one pale face to another along the miserable line of his captives. In a harsh, imperious voice he said something which brought Mansoor, the dragoman, to the front, with bent back and outstretched, supplicating palms. To his employers there had always seemed to be something comic in that flapping skirt and short cover-coat above it; but now,

under the glare of the mid-day sun, with those faces gathered round them, it appeared rather to add a grotesque horror to the scene. The dragoman salaamed like some ungainly, automatic doll, and then, as the chief rasped out a curt word or two, he fell suddenly upon his face, rubbing his forehead into the sand, and flapping upon it with his hands.

"What's that, Cochrane?" asked Belmont. "Why is he making an exhibition of himself?"

"As far as I can understand, it is all up with us," the Colonel answered.

"But this is absurd," cried the Frenchman, excitedly; "why should these people wish any harm to me? I have never injured them. On the other hand, I have always been their friend. If I could but speak to them, I would make them comprehend. Hola, dragoman, Mansoor!"

The excited gestures of Monsieur Fardet drew the sinister eyes of the Baggara chief upon him. Again he asked a curt question, and Mansoor, kneeling in front of him, answered it.

"Tell him that I am a Frenchman, dragoman. Tell him that I am a friend of the Khalifa. Tell him that my countrymen have never had any quarrel with him, but that his enemies are also ours."

"The chief asks what religion you call your own," said Mansoor. "The Khalifa, he says, has no necessity for any friendship from those who are infidels and unbelievers."

"Tell him that in France we look upon all religions as good."

"The chief says that none but a blaspheming dog and the son of a dog would say that all religions are one as good as the other. He says that if you are

indeed the friend of the Khalifa, you will accept the Koran and become a true believer upon the spot. If you will do so, he will promise on his side to send you alive to Khartoum."

"And if not?"

"You will fare in the same way as the others."

"Then you may make my compliments to monsieur the chief, and tell him that it is not the custom for Frenchmen to change their religion under compulsion."

The chief said a few words, and then turned to consult with a short, sturdy Arab at his elbow.

"He says, Monsieur Fardet," said the dragoman, "that if you speak again he will make a trough out of you for the dogs to feed from. Say nothing to anger him, sir, for he is now talking what is to be done with us."

"Who is he?" asked the Colonel.

"It is Ali Wad Ibrahim, the same who raided last year, and killed all of the Nubian village."

"I've heard of him," said the Colonel. "He has the name of being one of the boldest and the most fanatical of all the Khalifa's leaders. Thank God that the women are out of his clutches."

The two Arabs had been talking in that stern, restrained fashion which comes so strangely from a southern race. Now they both turned to the dragoman, who was still kneeling upon the sand. They plied him with questions, pointing first to one and then to another of their prisoners. Then they conferred together once more, and finally said something to Mansoor, with a contemptuous wave of the hand to indicate that he might convey it to the others.

"Thank Heaven, gentlemen, I think that we are

saved for the present time," said Mansoor, wiping away the sand which had stuck to his perspiring forehead. "Ali Wad Ibrahim says that though an unbeliever should have only the edge of the sword from one of the sons of the Prophet, yet it might be of more profit to the beit-el-mal at Omdurman if it had the gold which your people will pay for you. Until it comes you can work as the slaves of the Khalifa, unless he should decide to put you to death. You are to mount yourselves upon the spare camels and to ride with the party."

The chief had waited for the end of the explanation. Now he gave a brief order, and a negro stepped forward with a long, dull-coloured sword in his hand. The dragoman squealed like a rabbit who sees a ferret, and threw himself frantically down upon the sand once more.

"What is it, Cochrane?" asked Cecil Brown,—for the Colonel had served in the East, and was the only one of the travellers who had a smattering of Arabic.

"As far as I can make out, he says there is no use keeping the dragoman, as no one would trouble to pay a ransom for him, and he is too fat to make a good slave."

"Poor devil!" cried Brown. "Here, Cochrane, tell them to let him go. We can't let him be butchered like this in front of us. Say that we will find the money amongst us. I will be answerable for any reasonable sum."

"I'll stand in as far as my means will allow," cried Belmont.

"We will sign a joint bond or indemnity," said the lawyer. "If I had a paper and pencil I could throw it into shape in an instant, and the chief

could rely upon its being perfectly correct and valid."

But the Colonel's Arabic was insufficient, and Mansoor himself was too maddened by fear to understand the offer which was being made for him. The negro looked a question at the chief, and then his long black arm swung upward and his sword hissed over his shoulder. But the dragoman had screamed out something which arrested the blow, and which brought the chief and the lieutenant to his side with a new interest upon their swarthy faces. The others crowded in also, and formed a dense circle around the grovelling, pleading man.

The Colonel had not understood this sudden change, nor had the others fathomed the reason of it, but some instinct flashed it upon Stephens's horrified perceptions.

"Oh, you villain!" he cried, furiously. "Hold your tongue, you miserable creature! Be silent! Better die—a thousand times better die!"

But it was too late, and already they could all see the base design by which the coward hoped to save his own life. He was about to betray the women. They saw the chief, with a brave man's contempt upon his stern face, make a sign of haughty assent, and then Mansoor spoke rapidly and earnestly, pointing up the hill. At a word from the Baggara, a dozen of the raiders rushed up the path and were lost to view upon the top. Then came a shrill cry, a horrible, strenuous scream of surprise and terror, and an instant later the party streamed into sight again, dragging the women in their midst. Sadie, with her young, active limbs, kept up with them as they sprang down the slope, encouraging her aunt all the while over her shoulder. The older lady,

struggling amid the rushing white figures, looked with her thin limbs and open mouth like a chicken being dragged from a coop.

The chief's dark eyes glanced indifferently at Miss Adams, but gazed with a smouldering fire at the younger woman. Then he gave an abrupt order, and the prisoners were hurried in a miserable, hopeless drove to the cluster of kneeling camels. Their pockets had already been ransacked, and the contents thrown into one of the camel-food bags, the neck of which was tied up by Ali Wad Ibrahim's own hands.

"I say, Cochrane," whispered Belmont, looking with smouldering eyes at the wretched Mansoor, "I've got a little hip revolver which they have not discovered. Shall I shoot that cursed dragoman for giving away the women?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"You had better keep it," said he, with a sombre face. "The women may find some other use for it before all is over."

CHAPTER V

THE camels, some brown and some white, were kneeling in a long line, their champing jaws moving rhythmically from side to side, and their gracefully poised heads turning to right and left in a mincing, self-conscious fashion. Most of them were beautiful creatures, true Arabian trotters, with the slim limbs and finely turned necks which mark the breed; but amongst them were a few of the slower, heavier beasts, with ungroomed skins, disfigured by the black scars of old firings. These were loaded with the doora and the water-skins of the raiders, but a few minutes sufficed to redistribute their loads and to make place for the prisoners. None of these had been bound with the exception of Mr. Stuart,—for the Arabs, understanding that he was a clergyman, and accustomed to associate religion with violence, had looked upon his fierce outburst as quite natural, and regarded him now as the most dangerous and enterprising of their captives. His hands were therefore tied together with a plaited camel-halter, but the others, including the dragoman and the two wounded blacks, were allowed to mount without any precaution against their escape, save that which was afforded by the slowness of their beasts. Then, with a shouting of men and a roaring of camels, the creatures were jolted on to their legs, and the long, straggling procession set off with its back to the homely river, and its face to the shim-

mering, violet haze, which hung round the huge sweep of beautiful, terrible desert, striped tiger-fashion with black rock and with golden sand.

None of the white prisoners with the exception of Colonel Cochrane had ever been upon a camel before. It seemed an alarming distance to the ground when they looked down, and the curious swaying motion, with the insecurity of the saddle, made them sick and frightened. But their bodily discomfort was forgotten in the turmoil of bitter thoughts within. What a chasm gaped between their old life and their new! And yet how short was the time and space which divided them! Less than an hour ago they had stood upon the summit of that rock and had laughed and chattered, or grumbled at the heat and flies, becoming peevish at small discomforts. Headingly had been hypercritical over the tints of Nature. They could not forget his own tint as he lay with his cheek upon the black stone. Sadie had chattered about tailor-made dresses and Parisian chiffons. Now she was clinging, half-crazy, to the pommel of a wooden saddle, with suicide rising as a red star of hope in her mind. Humanity, reason, argument,—all were gone, and there remained the brutal humiliation of force. And all the time, down there by the second rocky point, their steamer was waiting for them, —their saloon, with the white napery and the glittering glasses, the latest novel, and the London papers. The least imaginative of them could see it so clearly: the white awning, Mrs. Shlesinger with her yellow sun-hat, Mrs. Belmont lying back in the canvas chair. There it lay almost in sight of them, that little floating chip broken off from home, and every silent, ungainly step of the camels

was carrying them more hopelessly away from it. That very morning how beneficent Providence had appeared, how pleasant was life!—a little commonplace, perhaps, but so soothing and restful. And now!

The red head-gear, patched jibbehs, and yellow boots had already shown to the Colonel that these men were no wandering party of robbers, but a troop from the regular army of the Khalifa. Now, as they struck across the desert, they showed that they possessed the rude discipline which their work demanded. A mile ahead, and far out on either flank, rode their scouts, dipping and rising among the yellow sand-hills. Ali Wad Ibrahim headed the caravan, and his short, sturdy lieutenant brought up the rear. The main party straggled over a couple of hundred yards, and in the middle was the little, dejected clump of prisoners. No attempt was made to keep them apart, and Mr. Stephens soon contrived that his camel should be between those of the two ladies.

"Don't be down-hearted, Miss Adams," said he. "This is a most indefensible outrage, but there can be no question that steps will be taken in the proper quarter to set the matter right. I am convinced that we shall be subjected to nothing worse than a temporary inconvenience. If it had not been for that villain Mansoor, you need not have appeared at all."

It was shocking to see the change in the little Bostonian lady, for she had shrunk to an old woman in an hour. Her swarthy cheeks had fallen in, and her eyes shone wildly from sunken, darkened sockets. Her frightened glances were continually turned upon Sadie. There is surely

some wrecker angel which can only gather her best treasures in moments of disaster. For here were all these worldlings going to their doom, and already frivolity and selfishness had passed away from them, and each was thinking and grieving only for the other. Sadie thought of her aunt, her aunt thought of Sadie, the men thought of the women, Belmont thought of his wife,—and then he thought of something else also, and he kicked his camel's shoulder with his heel until he found himself upon the near side of Miss Adams.

"I've got something for you here," he whispered. "We may be separated soon, so it is as well to make our arrangements."

"Separated!" wailed Miss Adams.

"Don't speak loud, for that infernal Mansoor may give us away again. I hope it won't be so, but it might. We must be prepared for the worst. For example, they might determine to get rid of us men and to keep you."

Miss Adams shuddered.

"What am I to do? For God's sake, tell me what I am to do, Mr. Belmont! I am an old woman. I have had my day. I could stand it if it was only myself. But Sadie—I am clean crazed when I think of her. There's her mother waiting at home, and I——" She clasped her thin hands together in the agony of her thoughts.

"Put your hand out under your dust-cloak," said Belmont, sidling his camel up against hers. "Don't miss your grip of it. There! Now hide it in your dress, and you'll always have a key to unlock any door."

Miss Adams felt what it was which he had slipped into her hand, and she looked at him for a

moment in bewilderment. Then she pursed up her lips and shook her stern, brown face in disapproval. But she pushed the little pistol into its hiding-place, all the same, and she rode with her thoughts in a whirl. Could this indeed be she, Eliza Adams, of Boston, whose narrow, happy life had oscillated between the comfortable house in Commonwealth Avenue and the Tremont Presbyterian Church? Here she was, hunched upon a camel, with her hand upon the butt of a pistol, and her mind weighing the justifications of murder. Oh, life, sly, sleek, treacherous life, how are we ever to trust you? Show us your worst and we can face it, but it is when you are sweetest and smoothest that we have most to fear from you.

"At the worst, Miss Sadie, it will only be a question of ransom," said Stephens, arguing against his own convictions. "Besides, we are still close to Egypt, far away from the Dervish country. There is sure to be an energetic pursuit. You must try not to lose your courage, and to hope for the best."

"No, I am not scared, Mr. Stephens," said Sadie, turning toward him a blanched face which belied her words. "We're all in God's hands, and surely He won't be cruel to us. It is easy to talk about trusting Him when things are going well, but now is the real test. If He's up there behind that blue heaven——"

"He is," said a voice behind them, and they found that the Birmingham clergyman had joined the party. His tied hands clutched on to his Makloofa saddle, and his fat body swayed dangerously from side to side with every stride of the camel. His wounded leg was oozing with blood

and clotted with flies, and the burning desert sun beat down upon his bare head, for he had lost both hat and umbrella in the scuffle. A rising fever flecked his large, white cheeks with a touch of colour, and brought a light into his brown ox-eyes. He had always seemed a somewhat gross and vulgar person to his fellow-travellers. Now, this bitter healing draught of sorrow had transformed him. He was purified, spiritualised, exalted. He had become so calmly strong that he made the others feel stronger as they looked upon him. He spoke of life and of death, of the present, and their hopes of the future; and the black cloud of their misery began to show a golden rift or two. Cecil Brown shrugged his shoulders, for he could not change in an hour the convictions of his life; but the others, even Fardet, the Frenchman, were touched and strengthened. They all took off their hats when he prayed. Then the Colonel made a turban out of his red silk cummerbund, and insisted that Mr. Stuart should wear it. With his homely dress and gorgeous head-gear, he looked like a man who has dressed up to amuse the children.

And now the dull, ceaseless, insufferable torment of thirst was added to the aching weariness which came from the motion of the camels. The sun glared down upon them, and then up again from the yellow sand, and the great plain shimmered and glowed until they felt as if they were riding over a cooling sheet of molten metal. Their lips were parched and dried, and their tongues like tags of leather. They lisped curiously in their speech, for it was only the vowel sounds which would come without an effort. Miss Adams's chin had dropped

upon her chest, and her great hat concealed her face.

"Auntie will faint if she does not get water," said Sadie. "Oh, Mr. Stephens, is there nothing we could do?"

The Dervishes riding near were all Baggara with the exception of one negro,—an uncouth fellow with a face pitted with smallpox. His expression seemed good-natured when compared with that of his Arab comrades, and Stephens ventured to touch his elbow and to point to his water-skin, and then to the exhausted lady. The negro shook his head brusquely, but at the same time he glanced significantly toward the Arabs, as if to say that, if it were not for them, he might act differently. Then he laid his black forefinger upon the breast of his jibbeh.

"Tippy Tilly," said he.

"What's that?" asked Colonel Cochrane.

"Tippy Tilly," repeated the negro, sinking his voice as if he wished only the prisoners to hear him.

The Colonel shook his head.

"My Arabic won't bear much strain. I don't know what he is saying," said he.

"Tippy Tilly. Hicks Pasha," the negro repeated.

"I believe the fellow is friendly to us, but I can't quite make him out," said Cochrane to Belmont. "Do you think that he means that his name is Tippy Tilly, and that he killed Hicks Pasha?"

The negro showed his great white teeth at hearing his own words coming back to him. "Aiwa!" said he. "Tippy Tilly—Bimbashi Mormer—Boum!"

"By Jove, I got it!" cried Belmont. "He's trying to speak English. Tippy Tilly is as near as he can get to Egyptian Artillery. He has served in the Egyptian Artillery under Bimbashi Mortimer. He was taken prisoner when Hicks Pasha was destroyed, and had to turn Dervish to save his skin. How's that?"

The Colonel said a few words of Arabic and received a reply, but two of the Arabs closed up, and the negro quickened his pace and left them.

"You are quite right," said the Colonel. "The fellow is friendly to us, and would rather fight for the Khedive than for the Khalifa. I don't know that he can do us any good, but I've been in worse holes than this, and come out right side up. After all, we are not out of reach of pursuit, and won't be for another forty-eight hours."

Belmont calculated the matter out in his slow, deliberate fashion.

"It was about twelve that we were on the rock," said he. "They would become alarmed aboard the steamer if we did not appear at two."

"Yes," the Colonel interrupted, "that was to be our lunch hour. I remember saying that when I came back I would have—— Oh, Lord, it's best not to think about it!"

"The reis was a sleepy old crock," Belmont continued; "but I have absolute confidence in the promptness and decision of my wife. She would insist upon an immediate alarm being given. Suppose they started back at two-thirty, they should be at Halfa by three, since the journey is down stream. How long did they say that it took to turn out the Camel Corps?"

"Give them an hour."

"And another hour to get them across the river. They would be at the Abousir Rock and pick up the tracks by six o'clock. After that it is a clear race. We are only four hours ahead, and some of these beasts are very spent. We may be saved yet, Cochrane!"

"Some of us may. I don't expect to see the padre alive to-morrow, nor Miss Adams either. They are not made for this sort of thing, either of them. Then, again, we must not forget that these people have a trick of murdering their prisoners when they think that there is a chance of a rescue. See here, Belmont, in case you get back and I don't, there's a matter of a mortgage that I want you to set right for me." They rode on with their shoulders inclined to each other, deep in the details of business.

The friendly negro who had talked of himself as Tippy Tilly had managed to slip a piece of cloth soaked in water into the hand of Mr. Stephens, and Miss Adams had moistened her lips with it. Even the few drops had given her renewed strength, and, now that the first crushing shock was over, her wiry, elastic, Yankee nature began to reassert itself.

"These people don't look as if they would harm us, Mr. Stephens," said she. "I guess they have a working religion of their own, such as it is, and that what's wrong to us is wrong to them."

Stephens shook his head in silence. He had seen the death of the donkey-boys, and she had not.

"Maybe we are sent to guide them into a better path," said the old lady. "Maybe we are specially singled out for a good work among them."

If it were not for her niece her energetic and enterprising temperament was capable of glorying in the chance of evangelising Khartoum, and turning Omdurman into a little well-drained, broad-avenued replica of a New England town.

"Do you know what I am thinking of all the time?" said Sadie. "You remember that temple that we saw,—when was it? Why, it was this morning."

They gave an exclamation of surprise, all three of them. Yes, it had been this morning; and it seemed away and away in some dim past experience of their lives, so vast was the change, so new and so overpowering the thoughts which had come between them. They rode in silence, full of this strange expansion of time, until at last Stephens reminded Sadie that she had left her remark unfinished.

"Oh, yes; it was the wall picture on that temple that I was thinking of. Do you remember the poor string of prisoners who are being dragged along to the feet of the great king,—how dejected they looked among the warriors who led them? Who could,—who *could* have thought that within three hours the same fate should be our own? And Mr. Headingly——," she turned her face away and began to cry.

"Don't take on, Sadie," said her aunt; "remember what the minister said just now, that we are all right there in the hollow of God's hand. Where do you think we are going, Mr. Stephens?"

The red edge of his Baedeker still projected from the lawyer's pocket, for it had not been worth their captors' while to take it. He glanced down at it.

"If they will only leave me this, I will look up

a few references when we halt. I have a general idea of the country, for I drew a small map of it the other day. The river runs from south to north, so we must be travelling almost due west. I suppose they feared pursuit if they kept too near the Nile bank. There is a caravan route, I remember, which runs parallel to the river, about seventy miles inland. If we continue in this direction for a day we ought to come to it. There is a line of wells through which it passes. It comes out at Assiout, if I remember right, upon the Egyptian side. On the other side, it leads away into the Dervish country,—so, perhaps——"

His words were interrupted by a high, eager voice which broke suddenly into a torrent of jostling words, words without meaning, pouring strenuously out in angry assertions and foolish repetitions. The pink had deepened to scarlet upon Mr. Stuart's cheeks, his eyes were vacant but brilliant, and he gabbled, gabbled, gabbled as he rode. Kindly mother Nature! she will not let her children be mishandled too far. "This is too much," she says; "this wounded leg, these crusted lips, this anxious, weary mind. Come away for a time, until your body becomes more habitable." And so she coaxes the mind away into the Nirvana of delirium, while the little cell-workers tinker and toil within to get things better for its home-coming. When you see the veil of cruelty which Nature wears, try and peer through it, and you will sometimes catch a glimpse of a very homely, kindly face behind.

The Arab guards looked askance at this sudden outbreak of the clergyman, for it verged upon lunacy, and lunacy is to them a fearsome and super-

natural thing. One of them rode forward and spoke with the Emir. When he returned he said something to his comrades, one of whom closed in upon each side of the minister's camel, so as to prevent him from falling. The friendly negro sidled his beast up to the Colonel, and whispered to him.

"We are going to halt presently, Belmont," said Cochrane.

"Thank God! They may give us some water. We can't go on like this."

"I told Tippy Tilly that, if he could help us, we would turn him into a Bimbashi when we got him back into Egypt. I think he's willing enough if he only had the power. By Jove, Belmont, do look back at the river."

Their route, which had lain through sand-strewn khors with jagged, black edges,—places up which one would hardly think it possible that a camel could climb,—opened out now on to a hard, rolling plain, covered thickly with rounded pebbles, dipping and rising to the violet hills upon the horizon. So regular were the long, brown pebble-strewn curves, that they looked like the dark rollers of some monstrous ground-swell. Here and there a little straggling sage-green tuft of camel-grass sprouted up between the stones. Brown plains and violet hills,—nothing else in front of them! Behind lay the black jagged rocks through which they had passed with orange slopes of sand, and then far away a thin line of green to mark the course of the river. How cool and beautiful that green looked in the stark, abominable wilderness! On one side they could see the high rock,—the accursed rock which had tempted them to their

ruin. On the other the river curved, and the sun gleamed upon the water. Oh, that liquid gleam, and the insurgent animal cravings, the brutal primitive longings, which for the instant took the soul out of all of them! They had lost families, countries, liberty, everything, but it was only of water, water, water, that they could think. Mr. Stuart, in his delirium, began roaring for oranges, and it was insufferable for them to have to listen to him. Only the rough, sturdy Irishman rose superior to that bodily craving. That gleam of river must be somewhere near Halfa, and his wife might be upon the very water at which he looked. He pulled his hat over his eyes, and rode in gloomy silence, biting at his strong, iron-grey moustache.

Slowly the sun sank toward the west, and their shadows began to trail along the path where their hearts would go. It was cooler, and a desert breeze had sprung up, whispering over the rolling, stone-strewed plain. The Emir at their head had called his lieutenant to his side, and the pair had peered about, their eyes shaded by their hands, looking for some landmark. Then, with a satisfied grunt, the chief's camel had seemed to break short off at its knees, and then at its hocks, going down in three curious, broken-jointed jerks until its stomach was stretched upon the ground. As each succeeding camel reached the spot it lay down also, until they were all stretched in one long line. The riders sprang off, and laid out the chopped tibbin upon cloths in front of them, for no well-bred camel will eat from the ground. In their gentle eyes, their quiet, leisurely way of eating, and their condescending, mincing manner, there was something both feminine and genteel, as though a party of

prim old maids had foregathered in the heart of the Libyan desert.

There was no interference with the prisoners, either male or female, for how could they escape in the centre of that huge plain? The Emir came toward them once, and stood combing out his blue-black beard with his fingers, and looking thoughtfully at them out of his dark, sinister eyes. Miss Adams saw with a shudder that it was always upon Sadie that his gaze was fixed. Then, seeing their distress, he gave an order, and a negro brought a water-skin, from which he gave each of them about half a tumblerful. It was hot and muddy and tasted of leather, but, oh, how delightful it was to their parched palates! The Emir said a few abrupt words to the dragoman and left.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mansoor began, with something of his old consequential manner; but a glare from the Colonel's eyes struck the words from his lips, and he broke away into a long, whimpering excuse for his conduct.

"How could I do anything otherwise," he wailed, "with the very knife at my throat?"

"You will have the very rope round your throat if we all see Egypt again," growled Cochrane, savagely. "In the meantime——"

"That's all right, Colonel," said Belmont. "But for our own sakes we ought to know what the chief has said."

"For my part I'll have nothing to do with the blackguard."

"I think that that is going too far. We are bound to hear what he has to say."

Cochrane shrugged his shoulders. Privations had made him irritable, and he had to bite his lip

to keep down a bitter answer. He walked slowly away, with his straight-legged military stride.

"What did he say, then?" asked Belmont, looking at the dragoman with an eye which was as stern as the Colonel's.

"He seems to be in a somewhat better manner than before. He said that if he had more water you should have it, but that he is himself short in supply. He said that to-morrow we shall come to the wells of Selimah, and everybody shall have plenty—and the camels too."

"Did he say how long we stopped here?"

"Very little rest, he said, and then forward! Oh, Mr. Belmont——"

"Hold your tongue!" snapped the Irishman, and began once more to count times and distances. If it all worked out as he expected, if his wife had insisted upon the indolent reis giving an instant alarm at Halfa, then the pursuers should be already upon their track. The Camel Corps or the Egyptian Horse would travel by moonlight better and faster than in the daytime. He knew that it was the custom at Halfa to keep at least a squadron of them all ready to start at any instant. He had dined at the mess, and the officers had told him how quickly they could take the field. They had shown him the water-tanks and the food beside each beast, and he had admired the completeness of the arrangements, with little thought as to what it might mean to him in the future. It would be at least an hour before they would all get started again from their present halting-place. That would be a clear hour gained. Perhaps by next morning——

And then, suddenly, his thoughts were terribly

interrupted. The Colonel, raving like a madman, appeared upon the crest of the nearest slope, with an Arab hanging on to each of his wrists. His face was purple with rage and excitement, and he tugged and bent and writhed in his furious efforts to get free. "You cursed murderers!" he shrieked, and then, seeing the others in front of him, "Belmont," he cried, "they've killed Cecil Brown."

What had happened was this. In his conflict with his own ill-humour, Cochrane had strolled over this nearest crest, and had found a group of camels in the hollow beyond, with a little knot of angry, loud-voiced men beside them. Brown was the centre of the group, pale, heavy-eyed, with his upturned, spiky moustache and listless manner. They had searched his pockets before, but now they were determined to tear off all his clothes in the hope of finding something which he had secreted. A hideous negro, with silver bangles in his ears, grinned and jabbered in the young diplomatist's impassive face. There seemed to the Colonel to be something heroic and almost inhuman in that white calm, and those abstracted eyes. His coat was already open, and the negro's great black paw flew up to his neck and tore his shirt down to the waist. And at the sound of that r-r-rip, and at the abhorrent touch of those coarse fingers, this man about town, this finished product of the nineteenth century, dropped his life-traditions and became a savage facing a savage. His face flushed, his lips curled back, he chattered his teeth like an ape, and his eyes—those indolent eyes which had always twinkled so placidly—were gorged and frantic. He threw himself upon the negro, and struck

him again and again, feebly but viciously, in his broad, black face. He hit like a girl, round arm, with an open palm. The man winced away for an instant, appalled by this sudden blaze of passion. Then with an impatient, snarling cry he slid a knife from his long loose sleeve and struck upward under the whirling arm. Brown sat down at the blow and began to cough—to cough as a man coughs who has choked at dinner, furiously, ceaselessly, spasm after spasm. Then the angry red cheeks turned to a mottled pallor, there were liquid sounds in his throat, and, clapping his hand to his mouth, he rolled over on to his side. The negro, with a brutal grunt of contempt, slid his knife up his sleeve once more, while the Colonel, frantic with impotent anger, was seized by the bystanders, and dragged, raving with fury, back to his forlorn party. His hands were lashed with a camel-halter, and he lay at last, in bitter silence, beside the delirious Nonconformist.

So Headingly was gone, and Cecil Brown was gone, and their haggard eyes were turned from one pale face to another, to know which they should lose next of that frieze of light-hearted riders who had stood out so clearly against the blue morning sky, when viewed from the deck-chairs of the *Korosko*. Two gone out of ten, and a third out of his mind. The pleasure trip was drawing to its climax.

Fardet, the Frenchman, was sitting alone with his chin resting upon his hands, and his elbows upon his knees, staring miserably out over the desert, when Belmont saw him start suddenly and prick up his head like a dog who hears a strange step. Then, with clenched fingers, he bent his

face forward and stared fixedly toward the black eastern hills through which they had passed. Belmont followed his gaze, and, yes—yes—there was something moving there! He saw the twinkle of metal, and the sudden gleam and flutter of some white garment. A Dervish vedette upon the flank turned his camel twice round as a danger signal, and discharged his rifle in the air. The echo of the crack had hardly died away before they were all in their saddles, Arabs and negroes. Another instant, and the camels were on their feet and moving slowly toward the point of alarm. Several armed men surrounded the prisoners, slipping cartridges into their Remingtons as a hint to them to remain still.

"By Heaven, they are men on camels!" cried Cochrane, his troubles all forgotten as he strained his eyes to catch sight of these new-comers. "I do believe that it is our own people." In the confusion he had tugged his hands free from the halter which bound them.

"They've been smarter than I gave them credit for," said Belmont, his eyes shining from under his thick brows. "They are here a long two hours before we could have reasonably expected them. Hurrah, Monsieur Fardet, *ça va bien, n'est ce pas?*"

"Hurrah, hurrah! *merveilleusement bien! Vivent les Anglais! Vivent les Anglais!*" yelled the excited Frenchman, as the head of a column of camelry began to wind out from among the rocks.

"See here, Belmont," cried the Colonel. "These fellows will want to shoot us if they see it is all up. I know their ways, and we must be ready for it. Will you be ready to jump on the fellow with the blind eye, and I'll take the big nigger, if I can

get my arms around him. Stephens, you must do what you can. You, Fardet, *comprenez vous? Il est necessaire* to plug these Johnnies before they can hurt us. You, dragoman, tell those two Soudanese soldiers that they must be ready—but, but" . . . his words died into a murmur and he swallowed once or twice. "These are Arabs," said he, and it sounded like another voice.

Of all the bitter day, it was the very bitterest moment. Happy Mr. Stuart lay upon the pebbles with his back against the ribs of his camel, and chuckled consumedly at some joke which those busy little cell-workers had come across in their repairs. His fat face was wreathed and creased with merriment. But the others, how sick, how heart-sick, were they all! The women cried. The men turned away in that silence which is beyond tears. Monsieur Fardet fell upon his face, and shook with dry sobbings.

The Arabs were firing their rifles as a welcome to their friends, and the others as they trotted their camels across the open returned the salutes and waved their rifles and lances in the air. They were a smaller band than the first one,—not more than thirty,—but dressed in the same red headgear and patched jibbehs. One of them carried a small white banner with a scarlet text scrawled across it. But there was something there which drew the eyes and the thoughts of the tourists away from everything else. The same fear gripped at each of their hearts, and the same impulse kept each of them silent. They stared at a swaying white figure half seen amidst the ranks of the desert warriors.

"What's that they have in the middle of them?"

cried Stephens at last. "Look, Miss Adams! Surely it is a woman!"

There was something there upon a camel, but it was difficult to catch a glimpse of it. And then suddenly, as the two bodies met, the riders opened out, and they saw it plainly.

"It's a white woman!"

"The steamer has been taken!"

Belmont gave a cry that sounded high above everything.

"Norah, darling," he shouted, "keep your heart up! I'm here, and it is all well!"

CHAPTER VI

So the *Korosko* had been taken, and the chances of rescue upon which they had reckoned—all those elaborate calculations of hours and distances—were as unsubstantial as the mirage which shimmered upon the horizon. There would be no alarm at Halfa until it was found that the steamer did not return in the evening. Even now, when the Nile was only a thin green band upon the farthest horizon, the pursuit had probably not begun. In a hundred miles or even less they would be in the Dervish country. How small, then, was the chance that the Egyptian forces could overtake them. They all sank into a silent, sulky despair, with the exception of Belmont, who was held back by the guards as he strove to go to his wife's assistance.

The two bodies of camel-men had united, and the Arabs, in their grave, dignified fashion, were exchanging salutations and experiences, while the negroes grinned, chattered, and shouted, with the careless good-humour which even the Koran has not been able to alter. The leader of the newcomers was a greybeard, a worn, ascetic, high-nosed old man, abrupt and fierce in his manner, and soldierly in his bearing. The dragoman groaned when he saw him, and flapped his hands miserably with the air of a man who sees trouble accumulating upon trouble.

"It is the Emir Abderrahman," said he. "I fear now that we shall never come to Khartoum alive."

The name meant nothing to the others, but Colonel Cochrane had heard of him as a monster of cruelty and fanaticism, a red-hot Moslem of the old fighting, preaching dispensation, who never hesitated to carry the fierce doctrines of the Koran to their final conclusions. He and the Emir Wad Ibrahim conferred gravely together, their camels side by side, and their red turbans inclined inward, so that the black beard mingled with the white one. Then they both turned and stared long and fixedly at the poor, head-hanging huddle of prisoners. The younger man pointed and explained, while his senior listened with a sternly impassive face.

"Who's that nice-looking old gentleman in the white beard?" asked Miss Adams, who had been the first to rally from the bitter disappointment.

"That is their leader now," Cochrane answered.

"You don't say that he takes command over that other one?"

"Yes, lady," said the dragoman; "he is now the head of all."

"Well, that's good for us. He puts me in mind of Elder Mathews, who was at the Presbyterian Church in minister Scott's time. Anyhow, I had rather be in his power than in the hands of that black-haired one with the flint eyes. Sadie, dear, you feel better now it's cooler, don't you?"

"Yes, Auntie; don't you fret about me. How are you yourself?"

"Well, I'm stronger in faith than I was. I set you a poor example, Sadie, for I was clean crazed at first at the suddenness of it all, and at thinking of what your mother, who trusted you to me, would think about it. My land, there'll be some head-

lines in the *Boston Herald* over this! I guess somebody will have to suffer for it."

"Poor Mr. Stuart!" cried Sadie, as the monotonous, droning voice of the delirious man came again to their ears. "Come, Auntie, and see if we cannot do something to relieve him."

"I'm uneasy about Mrs. Shlesinger and the child," said Colonel Cochrane. "I can see your wife, Belmont, but I can see no one else."

"They are bringing her over," cried he. "Thank God! We shall hear all about it. They haven't hurt you, Norah, have they?" He ran forward to grasp and kiss the hand which his wife held down to him as he helped her from the camel.

The kind, grey eyes and calm, sweet face of the Irishwoman brought comfort and hope to the whole party. She was a devout Roman Catholic, and it is a creed which forms an excellent prop in hours of danger. To her, to the Anglican Colonel, to the Nonconformist minister, to the Presbyterian American, even to the two Pagan black riflemen, religion in its various forms was fulfilling the same beneficent office,—whispering always that the worst which the world can do is a small thing, and that, however harsh the ways of Providence may seem, it is, on the whole, the wisest and best thing for us that we should go cheerfully whither the Great Hand guides us. They had not a dogma in common, these fellows in misfortune, but they held the intimate, deep-lying spirit, the calm, essential fatalism which is the world-old framework of religion, with fresh crops of dogmas growing like ephemeral lichens upon its granite surface.

"You poor things," she said. "I can see that

you have had a much worse time than I have. No, really, John, dear, I am quite well,—not even very thirsty, for our party filled their water-skins at the Nile, and they let me have as much as I wanted. But I don't see Mr. Headingly and Mr. Brown. And poor Mr. Stuart,—what a state he has been reduced to!"

"Headingly and Brown are out of their troubles," her husband answered. "You don't know how often I have thanked God to-day, Norah, that you were not with us. And here you are, after all."

"Where should I be but by my husband's side? I had much, *much* rather be here than safe at Halfa."

"Has any news gone to the town?" asked the Colonel.

"One boat escaped. Mrs. Shlesinger and her child and maid were in it. I was downstairs in my cabin when the Arabs rushed on to the vessel. Those on deck had time to escape, for the boat was alongside. I don't know whether any of them were hit. The Arabs fired at them for some time."

"Did they?" cried Belmont, exultantly, his responsive Irish nature catching the sunshine in an instant. "Then, be Jove, we'll do them yet, for the garrison must have heard the firing. What d'ye think, Cochrane? They must be full cry upon our scent this four hours. Any minute we might see the white puggaree of a British officer coming over that rise."

But disappointment had left the Colonel cold and sceptical.

"They need not come at all unless they come

strong," said he. "These fellows are picked men with good leaders, and on their own ground they will take a lot of beating." Suddenly he paused and looked at the Arabs. "By George!" said he, "that's a sight worth seeing!"

The great red sun was down with half its disc slipped behind the violet bank upon the horizon. It was the hour of Arab prayer. An older and more learned civilisation would have turned to that magnificent thing upon the skyline and adored *that*. But these wild children of the desert were nobler in essentials than the polished Persian. To them the ideal was higher than the material, and it was with their backs to the sun and their faces to the central shrine of their religion that they prayed. And how they prayed, these fanatical Moslems! Wrapt, absorbed, with yearning eyes and shining faces, rising, stooping, grovelling with their foreheads upon their praying carpets. Who could doubt, as he watched their strenuous, heart-whole devotion, that here was a great living power in the world, reactionary but tremendous, countless millions all thinking as one from Cape Juby to the confines of China? Let a common wave pass over them, let a great soldier or organiser arise among them to use the grand material at his hand, and who shall say that this may not be the besom with which Providence may sweep the rotten, decadent, impossible, half-hearted south of Europe, as it did a thousand years ago, until it makes room for a sounder stock?

And now as they rose to their feet the bugle rang out, and the prisoners understood that, having travelled all day, they were fated to travel all night also. Belmont groaned, for he had reckoned

upon the pursuers catching them up before they left this camp. But the others had already got into the way of accepting the inevitable. A flat Arab loaf had been given to each of them—what effort of the *chef* of the post-boat had ever tasted like that dry brown bread?—and then, luxury of luxuries, they had a second ration of a glass of water, for the fresh-filled bags of the new-comers had provided an ample supply. If the body would but follow the lead of the soul as readily as the soul does that of the body, what a heaven the earth might be! Now, with their base material wants satisfied for the instant, their spirits began to sing within them, and they mounted their camels with some sense of the romance of their position. Mr. Stuart remained babbling upon the ground, and the Arabs made no effort to lift him into his saddle. His large, white, upturned face glimmered through the gathering darkness.

"Hi, dragoman, tell them that they are forgetting Mr. Stuart," cried the Colonel.

"No use, sir," said Mansoor. "They say that he is too fat, and that they will not take him any farther. He will die, they say, and why should they trouble about him?"

"Not take him!" cried Cochrane. "Why, the man will perish of hunger and thirst. Where's the Emir? Hi!" he shouted, as the black-bearded Arab passed, with a tone like that in which he used to summon a dilatory donkey-boy. The chief did not deign to answer him, but said something to one of the guards, who dashed the butt of his Remington into the Colonel's ribs. The old soldier fell forward gasping, and was carried on half senseless, clutching at the pommel of his saddle. The women began

to cry, and the men with muttered curses and clenched hands writhed in that hell of impotent passion, where brutal injustice and ill-usage have to go without check or even remonstrance. Belmont gripped at his hip-pocket for his little revolver, and then remembered that he had already given it to Miss Adams. If his hot hand had clutched it, it would have meant the death of the Emir and the massacre of the party.

And now as they rode onward they saw one of the most singular of the phenomena of the Egyptian desert in front of them, though the ill-treatment of their companion had left them in no humour for appreciating its beauty. When the sun had sunk, the horizon had remained of a slaty-violet hue. But now this began to lighten and to brighten until a curious false dawn developed, and it seemed as if a vacillating sun was coming back along the path which it had just abandoned. A rosy pink hung over the west, with beautifully delicate sea-green tints along the upper edge of it. Slowly these faded into slate again, and the night had come. It was but twenty-four hours since they had sat in their canvas chairs discussing politics by starlight on the saloon deck of the *Korosko;* only twelve since they had breakfasted there and had started spruce and fresh upon their last pleasure trip. What a world of fresh impressions had come upon them since then! How rudely they had been jostled out of their take-it-for-granted complacency! The same shimmering silver stars as they had looked upon last night, the same thin crescent of moon—but they, what a chasm lay between that old pampered life and this!

The long line of camels moved as noiselessly as

ghosts across the desert. Before and behind were the silent swaying white figures of the Arabs. Not a sound anywhere, not the very faintest sound, until far away behind them they heard a human voice singing in a strong, droning, unmusical fashion. It had the strangest effect, this far-away voice, in that huge inarticulate wilderness. And then there came a well-known rhythm into that distant chant, and they could almost hear the words:

We nightly pitch our moving tent
A day's march nearer home.

Was Mr. Stuart in his right mind again, or was it some coincidence of his delirium, that he should have chosen this for his song? With moist eyes his friends looked back through the darkness, for well they knew that home was very near to this wanderer. Gradually the voice died away into a hum, and was absorbed once more into the masterful silence of the desert.

"My dear old chap, I hope you're not hurt?" said Belmont, laying his hand upon Cochrane's knee.

The Colonel had straightened himself, though he still gasped a little in his breathing.

"I am all right again, now. Would you kindly show me which was the man who struck me?"

"It was the fellow in front there—with his camel beside Fardet's."

"The young fellow with the moustache—I can't see him very well in this light, but I think I could pick him out again. Thank you, Belmont!"

"But I thought some of your ribs were gone."

"No; it only knocked the wind out of me."

"You must be made of iron. It was a frightful blow. How could you rally from it so quickly?"

The Colonel cleared his throat and hummed and stammered.

"The fact is, my dear Belmont—I'm sure you would not let it go further—above all not to the ladies; but I am rather older than I used to be, and rather than lose the military carriage which has always been dear to me, I——"

"Stays, be Jove!" cried the astonished Irishman.

"Well, some slight artificial support," said the Colonel, stiffly, and switched the conversation off to the chances of the morrow.

It still comes back in their dreams to those who are left, that long night's march in the desert. It was like a dream itself, the silence of it as they were borne forward upon those soft, shuffling sponge feet, and the flitting, flickering figures which oscillated upon every side of them. The whole universe seemed to be hung as a monstrous time-dial in front of them. A star would glimmer like a lantern on the very level of their path. They looked again, and it was a hand's-breadth up, and another was shining beneath it. Hour after hour the broad stream flowed sedately across the deep blue background, worlds and systems drifting majestically overhead, and pouring over the dark horizon. In their vastness and their beauty there was a vague consolation to the prisoners for their own fate, and their own individuality seemed trivial and unimportant amid the play of such tremendous forces. Slowly the grand procession swept across the heaven, first climbing, then hanging long with little apparent motion, and then sinking grandly downward, until away in the east the first cold grey glimmer appeared, and their own haggard faces shocked each other's sight.

The day had tortured them with its heat, and now the night had brought the even more intolerable discomfort of cold. The Arabs swathed themselves in their gowns and wrapped up their heads. The prisoners beat their hands together and shivered miserably. Miss Adams felt it most, for she was very thin, with the impaired circulation of age. Stephens slipped off his Norfolk jacket and threw it over her shoulders. He rode beside Sadie, and whistled and chatted to make her believe that her aunt was really relieving him by carrying his jacket for him, but the attempt was too boisterous not to be obvious. And yet it was so far true that he probably felt the cold less than any of the party, for the old, old fire was burning in his heart, and a curious joy was inextricably mixed with all his misfortunes, so that he would have found it hard to say if this adventure had been the greatest evil or the greatest blessing of his lifetime. Aboard the boat, Sadie's youth, her beauty, her intelligence and humour, all made him realise that she could at the best only be expected to charitably endure him. But now he felt that he was really of some use to her, that every hour she was learning to turn to him as one turns to one's natural protector; and above all, he had begun to find himself—to understand that there really was a strong, reliable man behind all the tricks of custom which had built up an artificial nature, which had imposed even upon himself. A little glow of self-respect began to warm his blood. He had missed his youth when he was young, and now in his middle age it was coming up like some beautiful belated flower.

"I do believe that you are all the time enjoying it, Mr. Stephens," said Sadie, with some bitterness.

"I would not go so far as to say that," he answered. "But I am quite certain that I would not leave you here."

It was the nearest approach to tenderness which he had ever put into a speech, and the girl looked at him in surprise.

"I think I've been a very wicked girl all my life," she said, after a pause. "Because I have had a good time myself, I never thought of those who were unhappy. This has struck me serious. If ever I get back I shall be a better woman—a more earnest woman—in the future."

"And I a better man. I suppose it is just for that that trouble comes to us. Look how it has brought out the virtues of all our friends. Take poor Mr. Stuart, for example. Should we ever have known what a noble, constant man he was? And see Belmont and his wife, in front of us, there, going fearlessly forward, hand in hand, thinking only of each other. And Cochrane, who always seemed on board the boat to be a rather stand-offish, narrow sort of man! Look at his courage, and his unselfish indignation when any one is ill used. Fardet, too, is as brave as a lion. I think misfortune has done us all good."

Sadie sighed.

"Yes, if it would end right here one might say so. But if it goes on and on for a few weeks or months of misery, and then ends in death, I don't know where we reap the benefit of those improvements of character which it brings. Suppose you escape, what will you do?"

The lawyer hesitated, but his professional instincts were still strong.

"I will consider whether an action lies, and

against whom. It should be with the organisers of the expedition for taking us to the Abousir Rock—or else with the Egyptian Government for not protecting their frontiers. It will be a nice legal question. And what will you do, Sadie?"

It was the first time that he had ever dropped the formal Miss, but the girl was too much in earnest to notice it.

"I will be more tender to others," she said. "I will try to make someone else happy in memory of the miseries which I have endured."

"You have done nothing all your life but made others happy. You cannot help doing it," said he. The darkness made it more easy for him to break through the reserve which was habitual with him. "You need this rough schooling far less than any of us. How could your character be changed for the better?"

"You show how little you know me. I have been very selfish and thoughtless."

"At least you had no need for all these strong emotions. You were sufficiently alive without them. Now it has been different with me."

"Why did you need emotions, Mr. Stephens?"

"Because anything is better than stagnation. Pain is better than stagnation. I have only just begun to live. Hitherto I have been a machine upon the earth's surface. I was a one-ideaed man, and a one-ideaed man is only one remove from a dead man. That is what I have only just begun to realise. For all these years I have never been stirred, never felt a real throb of human emotion pass through me. I had no time for it. I had observed it in others, and I had vaguely wondered whether there was some want in me which pre-

vented my sharing the experience of my fellow-mortals. But now these last few days have taught me how keenly I can live—that I can have warm hopes and deadly fears—that I can hate and that I can—well, that I can have every strong feeling which the soul can experience. I have come to life. I may be on the brink of the grave, but at least I can say now that I have lived."

"And why did you lead this soul-killing life in England?"

"I was ambitious—I wanted to get on. And then there were my mother and my sisters to be thought of. Thank Heaven, here is the morning coming. Your aunt and you will soon cease to feel the cold."

"And you without your coat?"

"Oh, I have a very good circulation. I can manage very well in my shirt-sleeves."

And now the long, cold, weary night was over, and the deep blue-black sky had lightened to a wonderful mauve-violet, with the larger stars still glinting brightly out of it. Behind them the grey line had crept higher and higher, deepening into a delicate rose-pink, with the fan-like rays of the invisible sun shooting and quivering across it. Then, suddenly, they felt its warm touch upon their backs, and there were hard black shadows upon the sand in front of them. The Dervishes loosened their cloaks and proceeded to talk cheerily among themselves. The prisoners also began to thaw, and eagerly ate the doora which was served out for their breakfasts. A short halt had been called, and a cup of water handed to each.

"Can I speak to you, Colonel Cochrane?" asked the dragoman.

"No, you can't," snapped the Colonel.

"But it is very important—all our safety may come from it."

The Colonel frowned and pulled at his moustache.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, at last.

"You must trust to me, for it is as much to me as to you to get back to Egypt. My wife and home, and children, are on one part, and a slave for life upon the other. You have no cause to doubt it."

"Well, go on!"

"You know the black man who spoke with you —the one who had been with Hicks?"

"Yes, what of him?"

"He has been speaking with me during the night. I have had a long talk with him. He said that he could not very well understand you, nor you him, and so he came to me."

"What did he say?"

"He said that there were eight Egyptian soldiers among the Arabs—six black and two fellaheen. He said that he wished to have your promise that they should all have very good reward if they helped you to escape."

"Of course they shall."

"They asked for one hundred Egyptian pounds each."

"They shall have it."

"I told him that I would ask you, but that I was sure that you would agree to it."

"What do they purpose to do?"

"They could promise nothing, but what they thought best was that they should ride their camels not very far from you, so that if any chance

should come they would be ready to take advantage."

"Well, you can go to him and promise two hundred pounds each if they will help us. You do not think we could buy over some Arabs?"

Mansoor shook his head. "Too much danger to try," said he. "Suppose you try and fail, then that will be the end to all of us. I will go tell what you have said." He strolled off to where the old negro gunner was grooming his camel and waiting for his reply.

The Emirs had intended to halt for a half-hour at the most, but the baggage-camels which bore the prisoners were so worn out with the long, rapid march, that it was clearly impossible that they should move for some time. They had laid their long necks upon the ground, which is the last symptom of fatigue. The two chiefs shook their heads when they inspected them, and the terrible old man looked with his hard-lined, rock features at the captives. Then he said something to Mansoor, whose face turned a shade more sallow as he listened.

"The Emir Abderrahman says that if you do not become Moslem, it is not worth while delaying the whole caravan in order to carry you upon the baggage-camels. If it were not for you, he says that we could travel twice as fast. He wishes to know therefore, once for ever, if you will accept the Koran." Then in the same tone, as if he were still translating, he continued: "You had far better consent, for if you do not he will most certainly put you all to death."

The unhappy prisoners looked at each other in despair. The two Emirs stood gravely watching them.

"For my part," said Cochrane, "I had as soon die now as be a slave in Khartoum."

"What do you say, Norah?" asked Belmont.

"If we die together, John, I don't think I shall be afraid."

"It is absurd that I should die for that in which I have never had belief," said Fardet. "And yet it is not possible for the honour of a Frenchman that he should be converted in this fashion." He drew himself up, with his wounded wrist stuck into the front of his jacket, "*Je suis Chrétien. J'y reste*," he cried, a gallant falsehood in each sentence.

"What do you say, Mr. Stephens?" asked Mansoor, in a beseeching voice. "If one of you would change, it might place them in a good humour. I implore you that you do what they ask."

"No, I can't," said the lawyer, quietly.

"Well then, you, Miss Sadie? You, Miss Adams? It is only just to say it once, and you will be saved."

"Oh, Auntie, do you think we might?" whimpered the frightened girl. "Would it be so very wrong if we said it?"

The old lady threw her arms round her.

"No, no, my own dear little Sadie," she whispered. "You'll be strong! You would just hate yourself for ever after. Keep your grip of me, dear, and pray if you find your strength is leaving you. Don't forget that your old aunt Eliza has you all the time by the hand."

For an instant they were heroic, this line of dishevelled, bedraggled pleasure-seekers. They were all looking Death in the face, and the closer they looked the less they feared him. They were conscious rather of a feeling of curiosity, together with

the nervous tingling with which one approaches a dentist's chair. The dragoman made a motion of his hands and shoulders, as one who has tried and failed. The Emir Abderrahman said something to a negro, who hurried away.

"What does he want a scissors for?" asked the Colonel.

"He is going to hurt the women," said Mansoor, with the same gesture of impotence.

A cold chill fell upon them all. They stared about them in helpless horror. Death in the abstract was one thing, but these insufferable details were another. Each had been braced to endure any evil in his own person, but their hearts were still soft for each other. The women said nothing, but the men were all buzzing together.

"There's the pistol, Miss Adams," said Belmont. "Give it here! We won't be tortured! We won't stand it!"

"Offer them money, Mansoor! Offer them anything!" cried Stephens. "Look here, I'll turn Mohammedan if they'll promise to leave the women alone. After all, it isn't binding—it's under compulsion. But I can't see the women hurt."

"No, wait a bit, Stephens!" said the Colonel. "We mustn't lose our heads. I think I see a way out. See here, dragoman! You tell that grey-bearded old devil that we know nothing about his cursed tinpot religion. Put it smooth when you translate it. Tell him that he cannot expect us to adopt it until we know what particular brand of rot it is that he wants us to believe. Tell him that if he will instruct us, we are perfectly willing to listen to his teaching, and you can add that any

creed which turns out such beauties as him, and that other bounder with the black beard, must claim the attention of every one."

With bows and suppliant sweepings of his hands the dragoman explained that the Christians were already full of doubt, and that it needed but a little more light of knowledge to guide them on to the path of Allah. The two Emirs stroked their beards and gazed suspiciously at them. Then Abderrahman spoke in his crisp, stern fashion to the dragoman, and the two strode away together. An instant later the bugle rang out as a signal to mount.

"What he says is this," Mansoor explained, as he rode in the middle of the prisoners. "We shall reach the wells by mid-day, and there will be a rest. His own Moolah, a very good and learned man, will come to give you an hour of teaching. At the end of that time you will choose one way or the other. When you have chosen, it will be decided whether you are to go to Khartoum or to be put to death. That is his last word."

"They won't take ransom?"

"Wad Ibrahim would, but the Emir Abderrahman is a terrible man. I advise you to give in to him."

"What have you done yourself? You are a Christian, too."

Mansoor blushed as deeply as his complexion would allow.

"I was yesterday morning. Perhaps I will be to-morrow morning. I serve the Lord as long as what He ask seem reasonable; but this is very otherwise."

He rode onward amongst the guards with a

freedom which showed that his change of faith had put him upon a very different footing to the other prisoners.

So they were to have a reprieve of a few hours, though they rode in that dark shadow of death which was closing in upon them. What is there in life that we should cling to it so? It is not the pleasures, for those whose hours are one long pain shrink away screaming when they see merciful Death holding his soothing arms out for them. It is not the associations, for we will change all of them before we walk of our own free wills down that broad road which every son and daughter of man must tread. Is it the fear of losing the I, that dear, intimate I, which we think we know so well, although it is eternally doing things which surprise us? Is it that which makes the deliberate suicide cling madly to the bridge-pier as the river sweeps him by? Or is it that Nature is so afraid that all her weary workmen may suddenly throw down their tools and strike, that she has invented this fashion of keeping them constant to their present work? But there it is, and all these tired, harassed, humiliated folk rejoiced in the few more hours of suffering which were left to them.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was nothing to show them as they journeyed onward that they were not on the very spot that they had passed at sunset upon the evening before. The region of fantastic black hills and orange sand which bordered the river had long been left behind, and everywhere now was the same brown, rolling, gravelly plain, the ground-swell with the shining rounded pebbles upon its surface, and the occasional little sprouts of sage-green camel-grass. Behind and before it extended, to where far away in front of them it sloped upward toward a line of violet hills. The sun was not high enough yet to cause the tropical shimmer, and the wide landscape, brown with its violet edging, stood out with a hard clearness in that dry, pure air. The long caravan straggled along at the slow swing of the baggage-camels. Far out on the flanks rode the vedettes, halting at every rise, and peering backward with their hands shading their eyes. In the distance their spears and rifles seemed to stick out of them, straight and thin, like needles in knitting.

"How far do you suppose we are from the Nile?" asked Cochrane. He rode with his chin on his shoulder and his eyes straining wistfully to the eastern sky-line.

"A good fifty miles," Belmont answered.

"Not so much as that," said the Colonel. "We could not have been moving more than fourteen

or fifteen hours, and a camel seldom goes more than two and a half miles an hour unless he is trotting. That would give about forty miles, but still it is, I fear, rather far for a rescue. I don't know that we are much the better for this postponement. What have we to hope for? We may just as well take our gruel."

"Never say die!" cried the cheery Irishman. "There's plenty of time between this and mid-day. Hamilton and Hedley of the Camel Corps are good boys, and they'll be after us like a streak. They'll have no baggage-camels to hold them back, you can lay your life on that! Little did I think, when I dined with them at mess that last night, and they were telling me all their precautions against a raid, that I should depend upon them for our lives."

"Well, we'll play the game out, but I'm not very hopeful," said Cochrane. "Of course, we must keep the best face we can before the women. I see that Tippy Tilly is as good as his word, for those five niggers and the two brown Johnnies must be the men he speaks of. They all ride together and keep well up, but I can't see how they are going to help us."

"I've got my pistol back," whispered Belmont, and his square chin and strong mouth set like granite. "If they try any games on the women, I mean to shoot them all three with my own hand, and then we'll die with our minds easy."

"Good man!" said Cochrane, and they rode on in silence. None of them spoke much. A curious, dreamy, irresponsible feeling crept over them. It was as if they had all taken some narcotic drug —the merciful anodyne which Nature uses when

a great crisis has fretted the nerves too far. They thought of their friends and of their past lives in the comprehensive way in which one views that which is completed. A subtle sweetness mingled with the sadness of their fate. They were filled with the quiet serenity of despair.

"It's devilish pretty," said the Colonel, looking about him. "I always had an idea that I should like to die in a real, good, yellow London fog. You couldn't change for the worse."

"I should have liked to have died in my sleep," said Sadie. "How beautiful to wake up and find yourself in the other world! There was a piece that Hetty Smith used to say at the college, 'Say not good-night, but in some brighter world wish me good-morning.'"

The Puritan aunt shook her head at the idea. "It's a terrible thing to go unprepared into the presence of your Maker," said she.

"It's the loneliness of death that is terrible," said Mrs. Belmont. "If we and those whom we loved all passed over simultaneously, we should think no more of it than of changing our house."

"If the worst comes to the worst, we won't be lonely," said her husband. "We'll all go together, and we shall find Brown and Headingly and Stuart waiting on the other side."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. He had no belief in survival after death, but he envied the two Catholics the quiet way in which they took things for granted. He chuckled to think of what his friends in the Café Cubat would say if they learned that he had laid down his life for the Christian faith. Sometimes it amused and sometimes it maddened him, and he rode onward with alternate

gusts of laughter and of fury, nursing his wounded wrist all the time like a mother with a sick baby.

Across the brown of the hard, pebbly desert there had been visible for some time a single long, thin, yellow streak, extending north and south as far as they could see. It was a band of sand not more than a few hundred yards across, and rising at the highest to eight or ten feet. But the prisoners were astonished to observe that the Arabs pointed at this with an air of the utmost concern, and they halted when they came to the edge of it like men upon the brink of an unfordable river. It was very light, dusty sand, and every wandering breath of wind sent it dancing into the air like a whirl of midges. The Emir Abderrahman tried to force his camel into it, but the creature, after a step or two, stood still and shivered with terror. The two chiefs talked for a little, and then the whole caravan trailed off with their heads for the north, and the streak of sand upon their left.

"What is it?" asked Belmont, who found the dragoman riding at his elbow. "Why are we going out of our course?"

"Drift sand," Mansoor answered. "Every sometimes the wind bring it all in one long place like that. To-morrow, if a wind comes, perhaps there will not be one grain left, but all will be carried up into the air again. An Arab will sometimes have to go fifty or a hundred miles to go round a drift. Suppose he tries to cross, his camel breaks its legs, and he himself is sucked in and swallowed."

"How long will this be?"

"No one can say."

"Well, Cochrane, it's all in our favour. The longer the chase the better chance for the fresh

camels!" and for the hundredth time he looked back at the long, hard sky-line behind them. There was the great, empty, dun-coloured desert, but where the glint of steel or the twinkle of white helmet for which he yearned?

And soon they cleared the obstacle in their front. It spindled away into nothing, as a streak of dust would which has been blown across an empty room. It was curious to see that when it was so narrow that one could almost jump it, the Arabs would still go for many hundreds of yards rather than risk the crossing. Then, with good, hard country before them once more, the tired beasts were whipped up, and they ambled on with a double-jointed jog-trot, which set the prisoners nodding and bowing in grotesque and ludicrous misery. It was fun at first, and they smiled at each other, but soon the fun had become tragedy as the terrible camel-ache seized them by spine and waist, with its deep, dull throb, which rises gradually to a splitting agony.

"I can't stand it, Sadie," cried Miss Adams, suddenly. "I've done my best. I'm going to fall."

"No, no, Auntie, you'll break your limbs if you do. Hold up, just a little, and maybe they'll stop."

"Lean back, and hold your saddle behind," said the Colonel. "There, you'll find that will ease the strain." He took the puggaree from his hat, and, tying the ends together, he slung it over her front pommel. "Put your foot in the loop," said he. "It will steady you like a stirrup."

The relief was instant, so Stephens did the same for Sadie. But presently one of the weary doora camels came down with a crash, its limbs starred

out as if it had split asunder, and the caravan had to come down to its old sober gait.

"Is this another belt of drift sand?" asked the Colonel, presently.

"No, it's white," said Belmont. "Here, Mansoor, what is that in front of us?"

But the dragoman shook his head.

"I don't know what it is, sir. I never saw the same thing before."

Right across the desert, from north to south, there was drawn a white line, as straight and clear as if it had been slashed with chalk across a brown table. It was very thin, but it extended without a break from horizon to horizon. Tippy Tilly said something to the dragoman.

"It's the great caravan route," said Mansoor.

"What makes it white, then?"

"The bones."

It seemed incredible, and yet it was true, for as they drew nearer they saw that it was indeed a beaten track across the desert, hollowed out by long usage, and so covered with bones that they gave the impression of a continuous white ribbon. Long, snouty heads were scattered everywhere, and the lines of ribs were so continuous that it looked in places like the framework of a monstrous serpent. The endless road gleamed in the sun as if it were paved with ivory. For thousands of years this had been the highway over the desert, and during all that time no animal of all those countless caravans had died there without being preserved by the dry, antiseptic air. No wonder, then, that it was hardly possible to walk down it now without treading upon their skeletons.

"This must be the route I spoke of," said

Stephens. "I remember marking it upon the map I made for you, Miss Adams. Baedeker says that it has been disused on account of the cessation of all trade which followed the rise of the Dervishes, but that it used to be the main road by which the skins and gums of Darfur found their way down to Lower Egypt."

They looked at it with a listless curiosity, for there was enough to engross them at present in their own fates. The caravan struck to the south along the old desert track, and this Golgotha of a road seemed to be a fitting avenue for that which awaited them at the end of it. Weary camels and weary riders dragged on together toward their miserable goal.

And now, as the critical moment approached which was to decide their fate, Colonel Cochrane, weighed down by his fears lest something terrible should befall the women, put his pride aside to the extent of asking the advice of the renegade dragoman. The fellow was a villain and a coward, but at least he was an Oriental, and he understood the Arab point of view. His change of religion had brought him into closer contact with the Dervishes, and he had overheard their intimate talk. Cochrane's stiff, aristocratic nature fought hard before he could bring himself to ask advice from such a man, and when he at last did so, it was in the gruffest and most unconciliatory voice.

"You know the rascals, and you have the same way of looking at things," said he. "Our object is to keep things going for another twenty-four hours. After that it does not much matter what befalls us, for we shall be out of the reach of rescue. But how can we stave them off for another day?"

"You know my advice," the dragoman answered; "I have already answered it to you. If you will all become as I have, you will certainly be carried to Khartoum alive. If you do not, you will never leave our next camping-place alive."

The Colonel's well-curved nose took a higher tilt, and an angry flush reddened his thin cheeks. He rode in silence for a little, for his Indian service had left him with a curried-prawn temper, which had had an extra touch of cayenne added to it by his recent experiences. It was some minutes before he could trust himself to reply.

"We'll set that aside," said he, at last. "Some things are possible and some are not. This is not."

"You need only pretend."

"That's enough," said the Colonel, abruptly.

Mansoor shrugged his shoulders.

"What is the use of asking me, if you become angry when I answer? If you do not wish to do what I say, then try your own attempt. At least you cannot say that I have not done all I could to save you."

"I'm not angry," the Colonel answered, after a pause, in a more conciliatory voice, "but this is climbing down rather farther than we care to go. Now, what I thought is this. You might, if you chose, give this priest, or Moolah, who is coming to us, a hint that we really are softening a bit upon the point. I don't think, considering the hole that we are in, that there can be very much objection to that. Then, when he comes, we might play up and take an interest and ask for more instruction, and in that way hold the matter over for a day or two. Don't you think that would be the best game?"

"You will do as you like," said Mansoor. "I have told you once for ever what I think. If you wish that I speak to the Moolah, I will do so. It is the fat, little man with the grey beard, upon the brown camel in front there. I may tell you that he has a name among them for converting the infidel, and he has a great pride in it, so that he would certainly prefer that you were not injured if he thought that he might bring you into Islam."

"Tell him that our minds are open then," said the Colonel. "I don't suppose the *padre* would have gone so far, but now that he is dead I think we may stretch a point. You go to him, Mansoor, and if you work it well we will agree to forget what is past. By the way, has Tippy Tilly said anything?"

"No, sir. He has kept his men together, but he does not understand yet how he can help you."

"Neither do I. Well, you go to the Moolah, and I'll tell the others what we have agreed."

The prisoners all acquiesced in the Colonel's plan, with the exception of the old New England lady, who absolutely refused even to show any interest in the Mohammedan creed. "I guess I am too old to bow the knee to Baal," she said. The most that she would concede was that she would not openly interfere with anything which her companions might say or do.

"And who is to argue with the priest?" asked Fardet, as they all rode together, talking the matter over. "It is very important that it should be done in a natural way, for if he thought that we were only trying to gain time he would refuse to have any more to say to us."

"I think Cochrane should do it, as the proposal is his," said Belmont.

"Pardon me!" cried the Frenchman. "I will not say a word against our friend the Colonel, but it is not possible that a man should be fitted for everything. It will all come to nothing if he attempts it. The priest will see through the Colonel."

"Will he?" said the Colonel, with dignity.

"Yes, my friend, he will, for like most of your countrymen, you are very wanting in sympathy for the ideas of other people, and it is the great fault which I find with you as a nation."

"Oh, drop the politics!" cried Belmont, impatiently.

"I do not talk politics. What I say is very practical. How can Colonel Cochrane pretend to this priest that he is really interested in his religion when, in effect, there is no religion in the world to him outside some little church in which he has been born and bred? I will say this for the Colonel, that I do not believe he is at all a hypocrite, and I am sure that he could not act well enough to deceive such a man as this priest."

The Colonel sat with a very stiff back and the blank face of a man who is not quite sure whether he is being complimented or insulted.

"You can do the talking yourself if you like," said he at last. "I should be very glad to be relieved of it."

"I think that I am best fitted for it, since I am equally interested in all creeds. When I ask for information, it is because in verity I desire it, and not because I am playing a part."

"I certainly think that it would be much better

if Monsieur Fardet would undertake it," said Mrs. Belmont, with decision, and so the matter was arranged.

The sun was now high, and it shone with dazzling brightness upon the bleached bones which lay upon the road. Again the torture of thirst fell upon the little group of survivors, and again, as they rode with withered tongues and crusted lips, a vision of the saloon of the *Korosko* danced like a mirage before their eyes, and they saw the white napery, the wine-cards by the places, the long necks of the bottles, the siphons upon the sideboard. Sadie, who had borne up so well, became suddenly hysterical, and her shrieks of senseless laughter jarred horribly upon their nerves. Her aunt on one side of her and Mr. Stephens on the other did all they could to soothe her, and at last the weary, over-strung girl relapsed into something between a sleep and a faint, hanging limp over her pommel, and only kept from falling by the friends who clustered round her. The baggage-camels were as weary as their riders, and again and again they had to jerk at their nose-ropes to prevent them from lying down. From horizon to horizon stretched that one huge arch of speckless blue, and up its monstrous concavity crept the inexorable sun, like some splendid but barbarous deity, who claimed a tribute of human suffering as his immemorial right.

Their course still lay along the old trade route, but their progress was very slow, and more than once the two Emirs rode back together and shook their heads as they looked at the weary baggage-camels on which the prisoners were perched. The greatest laggard of all was one which was ridden by a wounded Soudanese soldier. It was limping

badly with a strained tendon, and it was only by constant prodding that it could be kept with the others. The Emir Wad Ibrahim raised his Remington, as the creature hobbled past, and sent a bullet through its brain. The wounded man flew forward out of the high saddle, and fell heavily upon the hard track. His companions in misfortune, looking back, saw him stagger to his feet with a dazed face. At the same instant a Baggara slipped down from his camel with a sword in his hand.

"Don't look! don't look!" cried Belmont to the ladies, and they all rode on with their faces to the south. They heard no sound, but the Baggara passed them a few minutes afterward. He was cleaning his sword upon the hairy neck of his camel, and he glanced at them with a quick, malicious gleam of his teeth as he trotted by. But those who are at the lowest pitch of human misery are at least secured against the future. That vicious, threatening smile which might once have thrilled them left them now unmoved—or stirred them at most to vague resentment.

There were many things to interest them in this old trade route, had they been in a condition to take notice of them. Here and there along its course were the crumbling remains of ancient buildings, so old that no date could be assigned to them, but designed in some far-off civilisation to give the travellers shade from the sun or protection from the ever-lawless children of the desert. The mud bricks with which these refuges were constructed showed that the material had been carried over from the distant Nile. Once, upon the top of a little knoll, they saw the shattered plinth of a pillar of red Assouan granite, with the wide-winged sym-

bol of the Egyptian god across it, and the cartouche of the second Rameses beneath. After three thousand years one cannot get away from the ineffaceable footprints of the warrior-king. It is surely the most wonderful survival of history that one should still be able to gaze upon him, high-nosed and masterful, as he lies with his powerful arms crossed upon his chest, majestic even in decay, in the Gizeh Museum. To the captives, the cartouche was a message of hope, as a sign that they were not outside the sphere of Egypt. "They've left their card here once, and they may again," said Belmont, and they all tried to smile.

And now they came upon one of the most satisfying sights on which the human eye can ever rest. Here and there, in the depressions at either side of the road, there had been a thin scurf of green, which meant that water was not very far from the surface. And then, quite suddenly, the track dipped down into a bowl-shaped hollow, with a most dainty group of palm-trees, and a lovely greensward at the bottom of it. The sun gleaming upon that brilliant patch of clear, restful colour, with the dark glow of the bare desert around it, made it shine like the purest emerald in a setting of burnished copper. And then it was not its beauty only, but its promise for the future: water, shade, all that weary travellers could ask for. Even Sadie was revived by the cheery sight, and the spent camels snorted and stepped out more briskly, stretching their long necks and sniffing the air as they went. After the unhomely harshness of the desert, it seemed to all of them that they had never seen anything more beautiful than this. They looked below at the greensward with the dark, star-

like shadows of the palm-crowns, and then they looked up at those deep green leaves against the rich blue of the sky, and they forgot their impending death in the beauty of that Nature to whose bosom they were about to return.

The wells in the centre of the grove consisted of seven large and two small saucer-like cavities filled with peat-coloured water enough to form a plentiful supply for any caravan. Camels and men drank it greedily, though it was tainted by the all-pervading natron. The camels were picketed, the Arabs threw their sleeping-mats down in the shade, and the prisoners, after receiving a ration of dates and of doora, were told that they might do what they would during the heat of the day, and that the Moolah would come to them before sunset. The ladies were given the thicker shade of an acacia tree, and the men lay down under the palms. The great green leaves swished slowly above them; they heard the low hum of the Arab talk, and the dull champing of the camels, and then in an instant, by that most mysterious and least understood of miracles, one was in a green Irish valley, and another saw the long straight line of Commonwealth Avenue, and a third was dining at a little round table opposite to the bust of Nelson in the Army and Navy Club, and for him the swishing of the palm branches had been transformed into the long-drawn hum of Pall Mall. So the spirits went their several ways, wandering back along strange, untraced tracks of the memory, while the weary, grimy bodies lay senseless under the palm-trees in the Oasis of the Libyan Desert.

CHAPTER VIII

COLONEL COCHRANE was awakened from his slumber by some one pulling at his shoulder. As his eyes opened they fell upon the black, anxious face of Tippy Tilly, the old Egyptian gunner. His crooked finger was laid upon his thick, liver-coloured lips, and his dark eyes glanced from left to right with ceaseless vigilance.

"Lie quiet! Do not move!" he whispered, in Arabic. "I will lie here beside you, and they cannot tell me from the others. You can understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, if you will talk slowly."

"Very good. I have no great trust in this black man, Mansoor. I had rather talk direct with the Miralai."

"What have you to say?"

"I have waited long, until they should all be asleep, and now in another hour we shall be called to evening prayer. First of all, here is a pistol, that you may not say that you are without arms."

It was a clumsy, old-fashioned thing, but the Colonel saw the glint of a percussion-cap upon the nipple, and knew that it was loaded. He slipped it into the inner pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

"Thank you," said he; "speak slowly, so that I may understand you."

"There are eight of us who wish to go to Egypt. There are also four men in your party. One of us, Mehemet Ali, has fastened twelve camels together,

which are the fastest of all save only those which are ridden by the Emirs. There are guards upon watch, but they are scattered in all directions. The twelve camels are close beside us here,—those twelve behind the acacia tree. If we can only get mounted and started, I do not think that many can overtake us, and we shall have our rifles for them. The guards are not strong enough to stop so many of us. The water-skins are all filled, and we may see the Nile again by to-morrow night."

The Colonel could not follow it all, but he understood enough to set a little spring of hope bubbling in his heart. The last terrible day had left its mark in his livid face and his hair, which was turning rapidly to grey. He might have been the father of the spruce, well-preserved soldier who had paced with straight back and military stride up and down the saloon-deck of the *Korosko*.

"That is excellent," said he. "But what are we to do about the three ladies?"

The black soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"Mefeesh!" said he. "One of them is old, and in any case there are plenty more women if we get back to Egypt. These will not come to any hurt, but they will be placed in the harem of the Khalifa."

"What you say is nonsense," said the Colonel, sternly. "We shall take our women with us, or we shall not go at all."

"I think it is rather you who talk the thing without sense," the black man answered, angrily. "How can you ask my companions and me to do that which must end in failure? For years we have waited for such a chance as this, and now that it has come, you wish us to throw it away owing to this foolishness about the women."

"What have we promised you if we come back to Egypt?" asked Cochrane.

"Two hundred Egyptian pounds and promotion in the army,—all upon the word of an Englishman."

"Very good. Then you shall have three hundred each if you can make some new plan by which you can take the women with you."

Tippy Tilly scratched his woolly head in his perplexity.

"We might, indeed, upon some excuse, bring three more of the faster camels round to this place. Indeed, there are three very good camels among those which are near the cooking-fire. But how are we to get the women upon them?—and if we had them upon them, we know very well that they would fall off when they began to gallop. I fear that you men will fall off, for it is no easy matter to remain upon a galloping camel; but as to the women, it is impossible. No, we shall leave the women, and if you will not leave the women, then we shall leave all of you and start by ourselves."

"Very good! Go!" said the Colonel, abruptly, and settled down as if to sleep once more. He knew that with Orientals it is the silent man who is most likely to have his way.

The negro turned and crept away for some little distance, where he was met by one of his fellaheen comrades, Mehemet Ali, who had charge of the camels. The two argued for some little time,—for those three hundred golden pieces were not to be lightly resigned. Then the negro crept back to Colonel Cochrane.

"Mehemet Ali has agreed," said he. "He has gone to put the nose-rope upon three more of the

camels. But it is foolishness, and we are all going to our death. Now come with me, and we shall awaken the women and tell them."

The Colonel shook his companions and whispered to them what was in the wind. Belmont and Fardet were ready for any risk. Stephens, to whom the prospect of a passive death presented little terror, was seized with a convulsion of fear when he thought of any active exertion to avoid it, and shivered in all his long, thin limbs. Then he pulled out his Baedeker and began to write his will upon the fly-leaf, but his hand twitched so that it was hardly legible. By some strange gymnastic of the legal mind, a death, even by violence, if accepted quietly, had a place in the established order of things, while a death which overtook one galloping frantically over a desert was wholly irregular and discomposing. It was not dissolution which he feared, but the humiliation and agony of a fruitless struggle against it.

Colonel Cochrane and Tippy Tilly had crept together under the shadow of the great acacia tree to the spot where the women were lying. Sadie and her aunt lay with their arms round each other, the girl's head pillowed upon the old woman's bosom. Mrs. Belmont was awake, and entered into the scheme in an instant.

"But you must leave me," said Miss Adams, earnestly. "What does it matter at my age, anyhow?"

"No, no, Aunt Eliza; I won't move without you! Don't you think it!" cried the girl. "You've got to come straight away, or else we both stay right here where we are."

"Come, come, ma'am, there is no time for argu-

ing," said the Colonel, roughly. "Our lives all depend upon your making an effort, and we cannot possibly leave you behind."

"But I will fall off."

"I'll tie you on with my puggaree. I wish I had the cummerbund which I lent poor Stuart. Now, Tippy, I think we might make a break for it!"

But the black soldier had been staring with a disconsolate face out over the desert, and he turned upon his heel with an oath.

"There!" said he, sullenly. "You see what comes of all your foolish talking! You have ruined our chances as well as your own!"

Half a dozen mounted camel-men had appeared suddenly over the lip of the bowl-shaped hollow, standing out hard and clear against the evening sky, where the copper basin met its great blue lid. They were travelling fast, and waved their rifles as they came. An instant later the bugle sounded an alarm, and the camp was up with a buzz like an overturned bee-hive. The Colonel ran back to his companions, and the black soldier to his camel. Stephens looked relieved, and Belmont sulky, while Monsieur Fardet raved, with his one uninjured hand in the air.

"Sacred name of a dog!" he cried. "Is there no end to it, then? Are we never to come out of the hands of these accursed Dervishes?"

"Oh, they really are Dervishes, are they?" said the Colonel, in an acid voice. "You seem to be altering your opinions. I thought they were an invention of the British Government."

The poor fellows' tempers were getting frayed and thin. The Colonel's sneer was like a match to

a magazine, and in an instant the Frenchman was dancing in front of him with a broken torrent of angry words. His hand was clutching at Cochrane's throat before Belmont and Stephens could pull him off.

"If it were not for your grey hairs——" he said.

"Damn your impudence!" cried the Colonel.

"If we have to die, let us die like gentlemen, and not like so many corner-boys," said Belmont, with dignity.

"I only said I was glad to see that Monsieur Fardet had learned something from his adventures," the Colonel sneered.

"Shut up, Cochrane! What do you want to aggravate him for?" cried the Irishman.

"Upon my word, Belmont, you forget yourself! I do not permit people to address me in this fashion."

"You should look after your own manners, then."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, here are the ladies!" cried Stephens, and the angry, over-strained men relapsed into a gloomy silence, pacing up and down, and jerking viciously at their moustaches. It is a very catching thing, ill-temper, for even Stephens began to be angry at their anger, and to scowl at them as they passed him. Here they were at a crisis in their fate, with the shadow of death above them, and yet their minds were all absorbed in some personal grievance so slight that they could hardly put it into words. Misfortune brings the human spirit to a rare height, but the pendulum still swings.

But soon their attention was drawn away to more important matters. A council of war was

being held beside the wells, and the two Emirs, stern and composed, were listening to a voluble report from the leader of the patrol. The prisoners noticed that, though the fierce, old man stood like a graven image, the younger Emir passed his hand over his beard once or twice with a nervous gesture, the thin, brown fingers twitching among the long, black hair.

"I believe the Gippies are after us," said Belmont. "Not very far off either, to judge by the fuss they are making."

"It looks like it. Something has scared them."

"Now he's giving orders. What can it be? Here, Mansoor, what is the matter?"

The dragoman came running up with the light of hope shining upon his brown face.

"I think they have seen something to frighten them. I believe that the soldiers are behind us. They have given the order to fill the water-skins, and be ready for a start when the darkness comes. But I am ordered to gather you together, for the Moolah is coming to convert you all. I have already told him that you are all very much inclined to think the same with him."

How far Mansoor may have gone with his assurances may never be known, but the Mussulman preacher came walking toward them at this moment with a paternal and contented smile upon his face, as one who has a pleasant and easy task before him. He was a one-eyed man, with a fringe of grizzled beard and a face which was fat, but which looked as if it had once been fatter, for it was marked with many folds and creases. He had a green turban upon his head, which marked him as a Mecca pilgrim. In one hand he carried a

small brown carpet, and in the other a parchment copy of the Koran. Laying his carpet upon the ground, he motioned Mansoor to his side, and then gave a circular sweep of his arm to signify that the prisoners should gather round him, and a downward wave which meant that they should be seated. So they grouped themselves round him, sitting on the short green sward under the palm-tree, these seven forlorn representatives of an alien creed, and in the midst of them sat the fat little preacher, his one eye dancing from face to face as he expounded the principles of his newer, cruder, and more earnest faith. They listened attentively and nodded their heads as Mansoor translated the exhortation, and with each sign of their acquiescence the Moolah became more amiable in his manner and more affectionate in his speech.

"For why should you die, my sweet lambs, when all that is asked of you is that you should set aside that which will carry you to everlasting Gehenna, and accept the law of Allah as written by His prophet, which will assuredly bring you unimaginable joys, as is promised in the Book of the Camel? For what says the chosen one?"—and he broke away into one of those dogmatic texts which pass in every creed as an argument. "Besides, is it not clear that God is with us, since from the beginning, when we had but sticks against the rifles of the Turks, victory has always been with us? Have we not taken El Obeid, and taken Khartoum, and destroyed Hicks and slain Gordon, and prevailed against every one who has come against us? How, then, can it be said that the blessing of Allah does not rest upon us?"

The Colonel had been looking about him during

the long exhortation of the Moolah, and he had observed that the Dervishes were cleaning their guns, counting their cartridges, and making all the preparations of men who expected that they might soon be called upon to fight. The two Emirs were conferring together with grave faces, and the leader of the patrol pointed, as he spoke to them, in the direction of Egypt. It was evident that there was at least a chance of a rescue if they could only keep things going for a few more hours. The camels were not recovered yet from their long march, and the pursuers, if they were indeed close behind, were almost certain to overtake them.

"For God's sake, Fardet, try and keep him in play," said he. "I believe we have a chance if we can only keep the ball rolling for another hour or so."

But a Frenchman's wounded dignity is not so easily appeased. Monsieur Fardet sat moodily with his back against the palm-tree, and his black brows drawn down. He said nothing, but he still pulled at his thick, strong moustache.

"Come on, Fardet! We depend upon you," said Belmont.

"Let Colonel Cochrane do it," the Frenchman answered, snappishly. "He takes too much upon himself, this Colonel Cochrane."

"There! there!" said Belmont, soothingly, as if he were speaking to a fractious child. "I am quite sure that the Colonel will express his regret at what has happened, and will acknowledge that he was in the wrong——"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," snapped the Colonel.

"Besides, that is merely a personal quarrel,"

Belmont continued, hastily. "It is for the good of the whole party that we wish you to speak with the Moolah, because we all feel that you are the best man for the job."

But the Frenchman only shrugged his shoulders and relapsed into a deeper gloom.

The Moolah looked from one to the other, and the kindly expression began to fade away from his large, baggy face. His mouth drew down at the corners, and became hard and severe.

"Have these infidels been playing with us, then?" said he to the dragoman. "Why is it that they talk among themselves and have nothing to say to me?"

"He is getting impatient about it," said Cochrane. "Perhaps I had better do what I can, Belmont, since this damned fellow has left us in the lurch."

But the ready wit of a woman saved the situation.

"I am sure, Monsieur Fardet," said Mrs. Belmont, "that you, who are a Frenchman, and therefore a man of gallantry and honour, would not permit your own wounded feelings to interfere with the fulfilment of your promise and your duty toward three helpless ladies."

Fardet was on his feet in an instant, with his hand over his heart.

"You understand my nature, madame," he cried. "I am incapable of abandoning a lady. I will do all that I can in this matter. Now, Mansoor, you may tell the holy man that I am ready to discuss through you the high matters of his faith with him."

And he did it with an ingenuity which amazed

his companions. He took the tone of a man who is strongly attracted, and yet has one single remaining shred of doubt to hold him back. Yet as that one shred was torn away by the Moolah, there was always some other stubborn little point which prevented his absolute acceptance of the faith of Islam. And his questions were all so mixed up with personal compliments to the priest and self-congratulations that they should have come under the teachings of so wise a man and so profound a theologian, that the hanging pouches under the Moolah's eyes quivered with his satisfaction, and he was led happily and hopefully onward from explanation to explanation, while the blue overhead turned into violet, and the green leaves into black, until the great serene stars shone out once more between the crowns of the palm-trees.

"As to the learning of which you speak, my lamb," said the Moolah, in answer to some argument of Fardet's, "I have myself studied at the University of El Azhar at Cairo, and I know that to which you allude. But the learning of the faithful is not as the learning of the unbeliever, and it is not fitting that we pry too deeply into the ways of Allah. Some stars have tails, O my sweet lamb, and some have not; but what does it profit us to know which are which? For God made them all, and they are very safe in His hands. Therefore, my friend, be not puffed up by the foolish learning of the West, and understand that there is only one wisdom, which consists in following the will of Allah as His chosen prophet has laid it down for us in this book. And now, my lambs, I see that you are ready to come into Islam,

and it is time, for that bugle tells that we are about to march, and it was the order of the excellent Emir Abderrahman that your choice should be taken, one way or the other, before ever we left the wells."

"Yet, my father, there are other points upon which I would gladly have instruction," said the Frenchman, "for, indeed, it is a pleasure to hear your clear words after the cloudy accounts which we have had from other teachers."

But the Moolah had risen, and a gleam of suspicion twinkled in his single eye.

"This further instruction may well come afterward," said he, "since we shall travel together as far as Khartoum, and it will be a joy to me to see you grow in wisdom and in virtue as we go." He walked over to the fire, and stooping down, with the pompous slowness of a stout man, he returned with two half-charred sticks, which he laid crosswise upon the ground. The Dervishes came clustering over to see the new converts admitted into the fold. They stood round in the dim light, tall and fantastic, with the high necks and supercilious heads of the camels swaying above them.

"Now," said the Moolah, and his voice had lost its conciliatory and persuasive tone, "there is no more time for you. Here upon the ground I have made out of two sticks the foolish and superstitious symbol of your former creed. You will trample upon it, as a sign that you renounce it, and you will kiss the Koran, as a sign that you accept it, and what more you need in the way of instruction shall be given to you as you go."

They stood up, the four men and the three women, to meet the crisis of their fate. None of

them, except perhaps Miss Adams and Mrs. Belmont, had any deep religious convictions. All of them were children of this world, and some of them disagreed with everything which that symbol upon the earth represented. But there was the European pride, the pride of the white race which swelled within them, and held them to the faith of their countrymen. It was a sinful, human, un-Christian motive, and yet it was about to make them public martyrs to the Christian creed. In the hush and tension of their nerves low sounds grew suddenly loud upon their ears. Those swishing palm-leaves above them were like a swift-flowing river, and far away they could hear the dull, soft thudding of a galloping camel.

"There's something coming," whispered Cochrane. "Try and stave them off for five minutes longer, Fardet."

The Frenchman stepped out with a courteous wave of his uninjured arm, and the air of a man who is prepared to accommodate himself to anything.

"You will tell this holy man that I am quite ready to accept his teaching, and so I am sure are all my friends," said he to the dragoman. "But there is one thing which I should wish him to do in order to set at rest any possible doubts which may remain in our hearts. Every true religion can be told by the miracles which those who profess it can bring about. Even I, who am but a humble Christian, can, by virtue of my religion, do some of these. But you, since your religion is superior, can no doubt do far more, and so I beg you to give us a sign that we may be able to say that we know that the religion of Islam is the more powerful."

Behind all his dignity and reserve, the Arab has a good fund of curiosity. The hush among the listening Arabs showed how the words of the Frenchman as translated by Mansoor appealed to them.

"Such things are in the hands of Allah," said the priest. "It is not for us to disturb His laws. But if you have yourself such powers as you claim, let us be witnesses to them."

The Frenchman stepped forward, and raising his hand he took a large, shining date out of the Moolah's beard. This he swallowed and immediately produced once more from his left elbow. He had often given his little conjuring entertainment on board the boat, and his fellow-passengers had had some good-natured laughter at his expense, for he was not quite skilful enough to deceive the critical European intelligence. But now it looked as if this piece of obvious palming might be the point upon which all their fates would hang. A deep hum of surprise rose from the ring of Arabs, and deepened as the Frenchman drew another date from the nostril of a camel and tossed it into the air, from which, apparently, it never descended. That gaping sleeve was obvious enough to his companions, but the dim light was all in favour of the performer. So delighted and interested was the audience that they paid little heed to a mounted camel-man who trotted swiftly between the palm trunks. All might have been well had not Fardet, carried away by his own success, tried to repeat his trick once more, with the result that the date fell out of his palm and the deception stood revealed. In vain he tried to pass on at once to another of his little stock. The Moolah said something, and an Arab

struck Fardet across the shoulders with the thick shaft of his spear.

"We have had enough child's play," said the angry priest. "Are we men or babes, that you should try to impose upon us in this manner? Here is the cross and the Koran—which shall it be?"

Fardet looked helplessly round at his companions.

"I can do no more; you asked for five minutes. You have had them," said he to Colonel Cochrane.

"And perhaps it is enough," the soldier answered. "Here are the Emirs."

The camel-man, whose approach they had heard from afar, had made for the two Arab chiefs, and had delivered a brief report to them, stabbing with his forefinger in the direction from which he had come. There was a rapid exchange of words between the Emirs, and then they strode forward together to the group around the prisoners. Bigots and barbarians, they were none the less two most majestic men, as they advanced through the twilight of the palm grove. The fierce old greybeard raised his hand and spoke swiftly in short, abrupt sentences, and his savage followers yelped to him like hounds to a huntsman. The fire that smouldered in his arrogant eyes shone back at him from a hundred others. Here were to be read the strength and danger of the Mahdi movement; here in these convulsed faces, in that fringe of waving arms, in these frantic, red-hot souls, who asked nothing better than a bloody death, if their own hands might be bloody when they met it.

"Have the prisoners embraced the true faith?" asked the Emir Abderrahman, looking at them with his cruel eyes.

The Moolah had his reputation to preserve, and it was not for him to confess to a failure.

"They were about to embrace it, when——"

"Let it rest for a little time, O Moolah." He gave an order, and the Arabs all sprang for their camels. The Emir Wad Ibrahim filed off at once with nearly half the party. The others were mounted and ready, with their rifles unslung.

"What's happened?" asked Belmont.

"Things are looking up," cried the Colonel. "By George, I think we are going to come through all right. The Gippy Camel Corps are hot on our trail."

"How do you know?"

"What else could have scared them?"

"O Colonel, do you really think we shall be saved?" sobbed Sadie. The dull routine of misery through which they had passed had deadened all their nerves until they seemed incapable of any acute sensation, but now this sudden return of hope brought agony with it like the recovery of a frost-bitten limb. Even the strong, self-contained Belmont was filled with doubts and apprehensions. He had been hopeful when there was no sign of relief, and now the approach of it set him trembling.

"Surely they wouldn't come very weak," he cried. "Be Jove, if the Commandant let them come weak, he should be court-martialled."

"Sure, we're in God's hands, anyway," said his wife, in her soothing, Irish voice. "Kneel down with me, John, dear, if it's the last time, and pray that, earth or heaven, we may not be divided."

"Don't do that! Don't!" cried the Colonel, anxiously, for he saw that the eye of the Moolah was upon them. But it was too late, for the two

Roman Catholics had dropped upon their knees and crossed themselves. A spasm of fury passed over the face of the Mussulman priest at this public testimony to the failure of his missionary efforts. He turned and said something to the Emir.

"Stand up!" cried Mansoor. "For your life's sake, stand up! He is asking for leave to put you to death."

"Let him do what he likes!" said the obstinate Irishman; "we will rise when our prayers are finished, and not before."

The Emir stood listening to the Moolah, with his baleful gaze upon the two kneeling figures. Then he gave one or two rapid orders, and four camels were brought forward. The baggage-camels which they had hitherto ridden were standing unsaddled where they had been tethered.

"Don't be a fool, Belmont!" cried the Colonel; "everything depends upon our humouring them. Do get up, Mrs. Belmont! You are only putting their backs up!"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders as he looked at them. "*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, "were there ever such impracticable people? *Voilà!*" he added, with a shriek, as the two American ladies fell upon their knees beside Mrs. Belmont. "It is like the camels—one down, all down! Was ever anything so absurd?"

But Mr. Stephens had knelt down beside Sadie and buried his haggard face in his long, thin hands. Only the Colonel and Monsieur Fardet remained standing. Cochrane looked at the Frenchman with an interrogative eye.

"After all," said he, "it is stupid to pray all your life, and not to pray now when we have nothing to

hope for except through the goodness of Providence." He dropped upon his knees with a rigid, military back, but his grizzled, unshaven chin upon his chest. The Frenchman looked at his kneeling companions, and then his eyes travelled onward to the angry faces of the Emir and Moolah.

"*Sapristi!*" he growled. "Do they suppose that a Frenchman is afraid of them?" and so, with an ostentatious sign of the cross, he took his place upon his knees beside the others. Foul, bedraggled, and wretched, the seven figures knelt and waited humbly for their fate under the black shadow of the palm-tree.

The Emir turned to the Moolah with a mocking smile, and pointed at the results of his ministrations. Then he gave an order, and in an instant the four men were seized. A couple of deft turns with a camel-halter secured each of their wrists. Fardet screamed out, for the rope had bitten into his open wound. The others took it with the dignity of despair.

"You have ruined everything. I believe you have ruined me also!" cried Mansoor, wringing his hands. "The women are to get upon these three camels."

"Never!" cried Belmont. "We won't be separated!" He plunged madly, but he was weak from privation, and two strong men held him by each elbow.

"Don't fret, John!" cried his wife, as they hurried her toward the camel. "No harm shall come to me. Don't struggle, or they'll hurt you, dear."

The four men writhed as they saw the women dragged away from them. All their agonies had been nothing to this. Sadie and her aunt ap-

peared to be half senseless from fear. Only Mrs. Belmont kept a brave face. When they were seated the camels rose, and were led under the tree behind where the four men were standing.

"I've a pistol in me pocket," said Belmont, looking up at his wife. "I would give me soul to be able to pass it to you."

"Keep it, John, and it may be useful yet. I have no fears. Ever since we prayed I have felt as if our guardian angels had their wings round us." She was like a guardian angel herself as she turned to the shrinking Sadie, and coaxed some little hope back into her despairing heart.

The short, thick Arab, who had been in command of Wad Ibrahim's rearguard, had joined the Emir and the Moolah; the three consulted together, with occasional oblique glances toward the prisoners. Then the Emir spoke to Mansoor.

"The chief wishes to know which of you four is the richest man?" said the dragoman. His fingers were twitching with nervousness and plucking incessantly at the front of his cover-coat.

"Why does he wish to know?" asked the Colonel.

"I do not know."

"But it is evident," cried Monsieur Fardet. "He wishes to know which is the best worth keeping for his ransom."

"I think we should see this thing through together," said the Colonel. "It's really for you to decide, Stephens, for I have no doubt that you are the richest of us."

"I don't know that I am," the lawyer answered; "but, in any case, I have no wish to be placed upon a different footing to the others."

The Emir spoke again in his harsh, rasping voice.

"He says," Mansoor translated, "that the baggage-camels are spent, and that there is only one beast left which can keep up. It is ready now for one of you, and you have to decide among yourselves which is to have it. If one is richer than the others, he will have the preference."

"Tell him that we are all equally rich."

"In that case he says that you are to choose at once which is to have the camel."

"And the others?"

The dragoman shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said the Colonel, "if only one of us is to escape, I think you fellows will agree with me that it ought to be Belmont, since he is the married man."

"Yes, yes, let it be Monsieur Belmont," cried Fardet.

"I think so also," said Stephens.

But the Irishman would not hear of it.

"No, no, share and share alike," he cried. "All sink or all swim, and the devil take the flincher."

They wrangled among themselves until they became quite heated in this struggle of unselfishness. Some one had said that the Colonel should go because he was the oldest, and the Colonel was a very angry man.

"One would think I was an octogenarian," he cried. "These remarks are quite uncalled for."

"Well, then," said Belmont, "let us all refuse to go."

"But this is not very wise," cried the Frenchman. "See, my friends! Here are the ladies being carried off alone. Surely it would be far better that one of us should be with them to advise them."

They looked at one another in perplexity. What Fardet said was obviously true, but how could one of them desert his comrades? The Emir himself suggested the solution.

"The chief says," said Mansoor, "that if you cannot settle who is to go, you had better leave it to Allah and draw lots."

"I don't think we can do better," said the Colonel, and his three companions nodded their assent.

It was the Moolah who approached them with four splinters of palm-bark protruding from between his fingers.

"He says that he who draws the longest has the camel," says Mansoor.

"We must agree to abide absolutely by this," said Cochrane, and again his companions nodded.

The Dervishes had formed a semicircle in front of them, with a fringe of the oscillating heads of the camels. Before them was a cooking fire, which threw its red light over the group. The Emir was standing with his back to it, and his fierce face toward the prisoners. Behind the four men was a line of guards, and behind them again the three women, who looked down from their camels upon this tragedy. With a malicious smile, the fat, one-eyed Moolah advanced with his fist closed, and the four little brown spicules protruding from between his fingers.

It was to Belmont that he held them first. The Irishman gave an involuntary groan, and his wife gasped behind him, for the splinter came away in his hand. Then it was the Frenchman's turn, and his was half an inch longer than Belmont's. Then came Colonel Cochrane, whose piece was longer than the two others put together. Stephens's was

no bigger than Belmont's. The Colonel was the winner of this terrible lottery.

"You're welcome to my place, Belmont," said he. "I've neither wife nor child, and hardly a friend in the world. Go with your wife, and I'll stay."

"No, indeed! An agreement is an agreement. It's all fair play, and the prize to the luckiest."

"The Emir says that you are to mount at once," said Mansoor, and an Arab dragged the Colonel by his wrist-rope to the waiting camel.

"He will stay with the rearguard," said the Emir to his lieutenant. "You can keep the women with you also."

"And this dragoman dog?"

"Put him with the others."

"And they?"

"Put them all to death."

CHAPTER IX

As none of the three could understand Arabic, the order of the Emir would have been unintelligible to them had it not been for the conduct of Mansoor. The unfortunate dragoman, after all his treachery and all his subservience and apostasy, found his worst fears realised when the Dervish leader gave his curt command. With a shriek of fear the poor wretch threw himself forward upon his face, and clutched at the Arab's jibbeh, clawing with his brown fingers at the edge of the cotton skirt. The Emir tugged to free himself, and then, finding that he was still held by that convulsive grip, he turned and kicked at Mansoor with the vicious impatience with which one drives off a pestering cur. The dragoman's high red tarboosh flew up into the air, and he lay groaning upon his face where the stunning blow of the Arab's horny foot had left him.

All was bustle and movement in the camp, for the old Emir had mounted his camel, and some of his party were already beginning to follow their companions. The squat lieutenant, the Moolah, and about a dozen Dervishes surrounded the prisoners. They had not mounted their camels, for they were told off to be the ministers of death. The three men understood as they looked upon their faces that the sand was running very low in the glass of their lives. Their hands were still bound, but their guards had ceased to hold them.

They turned round, all three, and said good-bye to the women upon the camels.

"All up now, Norah," said Belmont. "It's hard luck when there was a chance of a rescue, but we've done our best."

For the first time his wife had broken down. She was sobbing convulsively, with her face between her hands.

"Don't cry, little woman! We've had a good time together. Give my love to all friends at Bray! Remember me to Amy McCarthy and to the Blessingtons. You'll find there is enough and to spare, but I would take Rogers's advice about the investments. Mind that!"

"O John, I won't live without you!" Sorrow for her sorrow broke the strong man down, and he buried his face in the hairy side of her camel. The two of them sobbed helplessly together.

Stephens meanwhile had pushed his way to Sadie's beast. She saw his worn, earnest face looking up at her through the dim light.

"Don't be afraid for your aunt and for yourself," said he. "I am sure that you will escape. Colonel Cochrane will look after you. The Egyptians cannot be far behind. I do hope you will have a good drink before you leave the wells. I wish I could give your aunt my jacket, for it will be cold to-night. I'm afraid I can't get it off. She should keep some of the bread, and eat it in the early morning."

He spoke quite quietly, like a man who is arranging the details of a picnic. A sudden glow of admiration for this quietly consistent man warmed her impulsive heart.

"How unselfish you are!" she cried. "I never

saw any one like you. Talk about saints! There you stand in the very presence of death, and you think only of us."

"I want to say a last word to you, Sadie, if you don't mind. I should die so much happier. I have often wanted to speak to you, but I thought that perhaps you would laugh, for you never took anything very seriously, did you? That was quite natural, of course, with your high spirits, but still it was very serious to me. But now I am really a dead man, so it does not matter very much what I say."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Stephens!" cried the girl.

"I won't, if it is very painful to you. As I said, it would make me die happier, but I don't want to be selfish about it. If I thought it would darken your life afterward or be a sad recollection to you I would not say another word."

"What did you wish to say?"

"It was only to tell you how I loved you. I always loved you. From the first I was a different man when I was with you. But of course it was absurd, I knew that well enough. I never said anything, and I tried not to make myself ridiculous. But I just want you to know about it now that it can't matter one way or the other. You'll understand that I really do love you when I tell you that, if it were not that I knew you were frightened and unhappy, these last two days in which we have been always together would have been infinitely the happiest of my life."

The girl sat pale and silent, looking down with wondering eyes at his upturned face. She did not know what to do or say in the solemn presence of this love which burned so brightly under the

shadow of death. To her child's heart it seemed incomprehensible,—and yet she understood that it was sweet and beautiful also.

"I won't say any more," said he; "I can see that it only bothers you. But I wanted you to know, and now you do know, so it is all right. Thank you for listening so patiently and gently. Good-bye, little Sadie! I can't put my hand up. Will you put yours down?"

She did so and Stephens kissed it. Then he turned and took his place once more between Belmont and Fardet. In his whole life of struggle and success he had never felt such a glow of quiet contentment as suffused him at that instant when the grip of death was closing upon him. There is no arguing about love. It is the innermost fact of life, the one which obscures and changes all the others, the only one which is absolutely satisfying and complete. Pain is pleasure, and want is comfort, and death is sweetness when once that golden mist is round it. So it was that Stephens could have sung with joy as he faced his murderers. He really had not time to think about them. The important, all-engrossing, delightful thing was that she could not look upon him as a casual acquaintance any more. Through all her life she would think of him—she would know.

Colonel Cochrane's camel was at one side, and the old soldier, whose wrists had been freed, had been looking down upon the scene, and wondering in his tenacious way whether all hope must really be abandoned. It was evident that the Arabs who were grouped round the victims were to remain behind with them, while the others who were mounted would guard the three women and him-

self. He could not understand why the throats of his companions had not been already cut, unless it were that with an Eastern refinement of cruelty this rearguard would wait until the Egyptians were close to them, so that the warm bodies of their victims might be an insult to the pursuers. No doubt that was the right explanation. The Colonel had heard of such a trick before.

But in that case there would not be more than twelve Arabs with the prisoners. Were there any of the friendly ones among them? If Tippy Tilly and six of his men were there, and if Belmont could get his arms free and his hand upon his revolver, they might come through yet. The Colonel craned his neck and groaned in his disappointment. He could see the faces of the guards in the firelight. They were all Baggara Arabs, men who were beyond either pity or bribery. Tippy Tilly and the others must have gone on with the advance. For the first time the stiff old soldier abandoned hope.

"Good-bye, you fellows! God bless you!" he cried, as a negro pulled at his camel's nose-ring and made him follow the others. The women came after him, in a misery too deep for words. Their departure was a relief to the three men who were left.

"I am glad they are gone," said Stephens, from his heart.

"Yes, yes, it is better," cried Fardet. "How long are we to wait?"

"Not very long now," said Belmont, grimly, as the Arabs closed in around them.

The Colonel and the three women gave one backward glance when they came to the edge of

the oasis. Between the straight stems of the palms they saw the gleam of the fire, and above the group of Arabs they caught a last glimpse of the three white hats. An instant later, the camels began to trot, and when they looked back once more the palm grove was only a black clump with the vague twinkle of a light somewhere in the heart of it. As with yearning eyes they gazed at that throbbing red point in the darkness, they passed over the edge of the depression, and in an instant the huge, silent, moonlit desert was round them without a sign of the oasis which they had left. On every side the velvet, blue-black sky, with its blazing stars, sloped downward to the vast, dun-coloured plain. The two were blurred into one at their point of junction.

The women had sat in the silence of despair, and the Colonel had been silent also—for what could he say?—but suddenly all four started in their saddles, and Sadie gave a sharp cry of dismay. In the hush of the night there had come from behind them the petulant crack of a rifle, then another, then several together, with a brisk rat-tat-tat, and then, after an interval, one more.

"It may be the rescuers! It may be the Egyptians!" cried Mrs. Belmont, with a sudden flicker of hope. "Colonel Cochrane, don't you think it may be the Egyptians?"

"Yes, yes," Sadie whimpered. "It must be the Egyptians."

The Colonel had listened expectantly, but all was silent again. Then he took his hat off with a solemn gesture.

"There is no use deceiving ourselves, Mrs. Belmont," said he; "we may as well face the truth.

Our friends are gone from us, but they have met their end like brave men."

"But why should they fire their guns? They had . . . they had spears." She shuddered as she said it.

"That is true," said the Colonel. "I would not for the world take away any real grounds of hope which you may have; but, on the other hand, there is no use in preparing bitter disappointments for ourselves. If we had been listening to an attack, we should have heard some reply. Besides, an Egyptian attack would have been an attack in force. No doubt it *is*, as you say, a little strange that they should have wasted their cartridges,—by Jove, look at that!"

He was pointing over the eastern desert. Two figures were moving across its expanse, swiftly and stealthily, furtive dark shadows against the lighter ground. They saw them dimly, dipping and rising over the rolling desert, now lost, now reappearing in the uncertain light. They were flying away from the Arabs. And then, suddenly they halted upon the summit of a sand-hill, and the prisoners could see them outlined plainly against the sky. They were camel-men, but they sat their camels astride as a horseman sits his horse.

"Gippy Camel Corps!" cried the Colonel.

"Two men," said Miss Adams, in a voice of despair.

"Only a vedette, ma'am! Throwing feelers out all over the desert. This is one of them. Main body ten miles off, as likely as not. There they go giving the alarm! Good old Camel Corps!"

The self-contained, methodical soldier had suddenly turned almost inarticulate with his excite-

ment. There was a red flash upon the top of the sand-hill, and then another, followed by the crack of the rifles. Then with a whisk the two figures were gone, as swiftly and silently as two trout in a stream.

The Arabs had halted for an instant, as if uncertain whether they should delay their journey to pursue them or not. There was nothing left to pursue now, for amid the undulations of the sand-drift the vedettes might have gone in any direction. The Emir galloped back along the line, with exhortations and orders. Then the camels began to trot, and the hopes of the prisoners were dulled by the agonies of the terrible jolt. Mile after mile and mile after mile they sped onward over that vast expanse, the women clinging as best they might to the pommels, the Colonel almost as spent as they, but still keenly on the lookout for any sign of the pursuers.

"I think . . . I think," cried Mrs. Belmont, "that something is moving in front of us."

The Colonel raised himself upon his saddle, and screened his eyes from the moonshine.

"By Jove, you're right there, ma'am. There are men over yonder."

They could all see them now, a straggling line of riders far ahead of them in the desert.

"They are going in the same direction as we," cried Mrs. Belmont, whose eyes were very much better than the Colonel's.

Cochrane muttered an oath into his moustache.

"Look at the tracks there," said he; "of course, it's our own vanguard who left the palm grove before us. The chief keeps us at this infernal pace in order to close up with them."

As they drew closer they could see plainly that it was indeed the other body of Arabs, and presently the Emir Wad Ibrahim came trotting back to take counsel with the Emir Abderrahman. They pointed in the direction in which the vedettes had appeared, and shook their heads like men who have many and grave misgivings. Then the raiders joined into one long, straggling line, and the whole body moved steadily on toward the Southern Cross, which was twinkling just over the skyline in front of them. Hour after hour the dreadful trot continued, while the fainting ladies clung on convulsively, and Cochrane, worn out but indomitable, encouraged them to hold out, and peered backward over the desert for the first glad signs of their pursuers. The blood throbbed in his temples, and he cried that he heard the roll of drums coming out of the darkness. In his feverish delirium he saw clouds of pursuers at their very heels, and during the long night he was for ever crying glad tidings which ended in disappointment and heartache. The rise of the sun showed the desert stretching away around them, with nothing moving upon its monstrous face except themselves. With dull eyes and heavy hearts they stared round at that huge and empty expanse. Their hopes thinned away like the light morning mist upon the horizon.

It was shocking to the ladies to look at their companion and to think of the spruce, hale old soldier who had been their fellow-passenger from Cairo. As in the case of Miss Adams, old age seemed to have pounced upon him in one spring. His hair, which had grizzled hour by hour during his privations, was now of a silvery white. White

stubble, too, had obscured the firm, clean line of his chin and throat. The veins of his face were injected and his features were shot with heavy wrinkles. He rode with his back arched and his chin sunk upon his breast, for the old, time-rotted body was worn out, but in his bright, alert eyes there was always a trace of the gallant tenant who lived in the shattered house. Delirious, spent, and dying, he preserved his chivalrous, protecting air as he turned to the ladies, shot little scraps of advice and encouragement at them, and peered back continually for the help which never came.

An hour after sunrise the raiders called a halt, and food and water were served out to all. Then at a more moderate pace they pursued their southern journey, their long, straggling line trailing out over a quarter of a mile of desert. From their more careless bearing and the way in which they chatted as they rode, it was clear that they thought that they had shaken off their pursuers. Their direction now was east as well as south, and it was evidently their intention after this long detour to strike the Nile again at some point far above the Egyptian outposts. Already the character of the scenery was changing, and they were losing the long levels of the pebbly desert, and coming once more upon those fantastic, sunburned black rocks and that rich orange sand through which they had already passed. On every side of them rose the scaly, conical hills with their loose, slag-like *débris*, and jagged-edged khors, with sinuous streams of sand running like water-courses down their centre. The camels followed each other, twisting in and out among the boulders, and scrambling with their adhesive, spongy feet over places which would have been impossible

for horses. Among the broken rocks those behind could sometimes only see the long, undulating, darting necks of the creatures in front, as if it were some nightmare procession of serpents. Indeed, it had much the effect of a dream upon the prisoners, for there was no sound, save the soft, dull padding and shuffling of the feet. The strange, wild frieze moved slowly and silently onward amid a setting of black stone and yellow sand, with the one arch of vivid blue spanning the rugged edges of the ravine.

Miss Adams, who had been frozen into silence during the long cold night, began to thaw now in the cheery warmth of the rising sun. She looked about her, and rubbed her thin hands together.

"Why, Sadie," she remarked, "I thought I heard you in the night, dear, and now I see that you have been crying."

"I have been thinking, Auntie."

"Well, we must try and think of others, dearie, and not of ourselves."

"It's not of myself, Auntie."

"Never fret about me, Sadie."

"No, Auntie, I was not thinking of you."

"Was it of any one in particular?"

"Of Mr. Stephens, Auntie. How gentle he was, and how brave! To think of him fixing up every little thing for us, and trying to pull his jacket over his poor roped-up hands, with those murderers waiting all round him. He's my saint and hero from now ever after."

"Well, he's out of his troubles anyhow," said Miss Adams, with that bluntness which the years bring with them.

"Then I wish I was also."

"I don't see how that would help him."

"Well, I think he might feel less lonesome," said Sadie, and drooped her saucy little chin upon her breast.

The four had been riding in silence for some little time, when the Colonel clapped his hand to his brow with a gesture of dismay.

"Good God!" he cried, "I am going off my head."

Again and again they had perceived it during the night, but he had seemed quite rational since daybreak. They were shocked, therefore, at this sudden outbreak, and tried to calm him with soothing words.

"Mad as a hatter," he shouted. "Whatever do you think I saw?"

"Don't trouble about it, whatever it was," said Mrs. Belmont, laying her hand soothingly upon his as the camels closed together. "It is no wonder that you are overdone. You have thought and worked for all of us so long. We shall halt presently, and a few hours' sleep will quite restore you."

But the Colonel looked up again, and again he cried out in his agitation and surprise.

"I never saw anything plainer in my life," he groaned. "It is on the point of rock on our right front,—poor old Stuart with my red cummerbund round his head just the same as we left him."

The ladies had followed the direction of the Colonel's frightened gaze, and in an instant they were all as amazed as he.

There was a black, bulging ridge like a bastion upon the right side of the terrible khor up which the camels were winding. At one point it rose

into a small pinnacle. On this pinnacle stood a solitary, motionless figure clad entirely in black, save for a brilliant dash of scarlet upon his head. There could not surely be two such short, sturdy figures or such large, colourless faces in the Libyan desert. His shoulders were stooping forward, and he seemed to be staring intently down into the ravine. His pose and outline were like a caricature of the great Napoleon.

"Can it possibly be he?"

"It must be. It is!" cried the ladies. "You see he is looking toward us and waving his hand."

"Good Heavens! They'll shoot him! Get down, you fool, or you'll be shot!" roared the Colonel. But his dry throat would only emit a discordant croaking.

Several of the Dervishes had seen the singular apparition upon the hill, and had unslung their Remingtons, but a long arm suddenly shot up behind the figure of the Birmingham clergyman, a brown hand seized upon his skirts, and he disappeared with a snap. Higher up the pass, just below the spot where Mr. Stuart had been standing, appeared the tall figure of the Emir Abderrahman. He had sprung upon a boulder, and was shouting and waving his arms, but the shouts were drowned in a long, rippling roar of musketry from each side of the khor. The bastion-like cliff was fringed with gun-barrels, with red tarbooshes drooping over the triggers. From the other lip also came the long spurts of flame and the angry clatter of the rifles. The raiders were caught in an ambuscade. The Emir fell, but was up again and waving. There was a splotch of blood upon his long white beard. He kept pointing and gesticulating,

but his scattered followers could not understand what he wanted. Some of them came tearing down the pass, and some from behind were pushing to the front. A few dismounted and tried to climb up sword in hand to that deadly line of muzzles, but one by one they were hit, and came rolling from rock to rock to the bottom of the ravine. The shooting was not very good. One negro made his way unharmed up the whole side, only to have his brains dashed out with the butt-end of a Martini at the top. The Emir had fallen off his rock and lay in a crumpled heap, like a brown and white patch-work quilt at the bottom of it. And then when half of them were down it became evident, even to those exalted fanatical souls, that there was no chance for them, and that they must get out of these fatal rocks and into the desert again. They galloped down the pass, and it is a frightful thing to see a camel galloping over broken ground. The beast's own terror, his ungainly bounds, the sprawl of his four legs all in the air together, his hideous cries, and the yells of his rider who is bucked high from his saddle with every spring, made a picture which is not to be forgotten. The women screamed as this mad torrent of frenzied creatures came pouring past them, but the Colonel edged his camel and theirs farther and farther in among the rocks and away from the retreating Arabs. The air was full of whistling bullets, and they could hear them smacking loudly against the stones all round them.

"Keep quiet, and they'll pass us," whispered the Colonel, who was all himself again now that the hour for action had arrived. "I wish to Heaven I could see Tippy Tilly or any of his friends. Now

is the time for them to help us." He watched the mad stream of fugitives as they flew past upon their shambling, squattering, loose-jointed beasts, but the black face of the Egyptian gunner was not among them.

And now it did really seem as if the whole body of them, in their haste to get clear of the ravine, had not a thought to spend upon the prisoners. The rush was past, and only stragglers were running the gantlet of the fierce fire which poured upon them from above. The last of all, a young Baggara with a black moustache and pointed beard, looked up as he passed and shook his sword in impotent passion at the Egyptian riflemen. At the same instant a bullet struck his camel, and the creature collapsed, all neck and legs, upon the ground. The young Arab sprang off its back, and, seizing its nose-ring, he beat it savagely with the flat of his sword to make it stand up. But the dim, glazing eye told its own tale, and in desert warfare the death of the beast is the death of the rider. The Baggara glared round like a lion at bay, his dark eyes flashing murderously from under his red turban. A crimson spot, and then another, sprang out upon his dark skin, but he never winced at the bullet wounds. His fierce gaze had fallen upon the prisoners, and with an exultant shout he was dashing toward them, his broad-bladed sword gleaming above his head. Miss Adams was the nearest to him, but at the sight of the rushing figure and the maniac face she threw herself off the camel upon the far side. The Arab bounded on to a rock and aimed a thrust at Mrs. Belmont, but before the point could reach her the Colonel leaned forward with his pistol and blew the man's head in.

Yet with a concentrated rage, which was superior even to the agony of death, the fellow lay kicking and striking, bounding about among the loose stones like a fish upon the shingle.

"Don't be frightened, ladies," cried the Colonel. "He is quite dead, I assure you. I am so sorry to have done this in your presence, but the fellow was dangerous. I had a little score of my own to settle with him, for he was the man who tried to break my ribs with his Remington. I hope you are not hurt, Miss Adams! One instant, and I will come down to you."

But the old Boston lady was by no means hurt, for the rocks had been so high that she had a very short distance to fall from her saddle. Sadie, Mrs. Belmont, and Colonel Cochrane had all descended by slipping on to the boulders and climbing down from them. But they found Miss Adams on her feet, and waving the remains of her green veil in triumph.

"Hurrah, Sadie! Hurrah, my own darling Sadie!" she was shrieking. "We are saved, my girl, we are saved after all."

"By George, so we are!" cried the Colonel, and they all shouted in an ecstasy together.

But Sadie had learned to think more about others during those terrible days of schooling. Her arms were round Mrs. Belmont, and her cheek against hers.

"You dear, sweet angel," she cried, "how can we have the heart to be glad when you—when you——"

"But I don't believe it is so," cried the brave Irishwoman. "No, I'll never believe it until I see John's body lying before me. And when I see that, I don't want to live to see anything more."

The last Dervish had clattered down the khor, and now above them on either cliff they could see the Egyptians—tall, thin, square-shouldered figures, looking, when outlined against the blue sky, wonderfully like the warriors in the ancient bas-reliefs. Their camels were in the background, and they were hurrying to join them. At the same time others began to ride down from the farther end of the ravine, their dark faces flushed and their eyes shining with the excitement of victory and pursuit. A very small Englishman, with a straw-coloured moustache and a weary manner, was riding at the head of them. He halted his camel beside the fugitives and saluted the ladies. He wore brown boots and brown belts with steel buckles, which looked trim and workmanlike against his kharki uniform.

"Had 'em that time—had 'em proper!" said he. "Very glad to have been of any assistance, I'm shaw. Hope you're none the worse for it all. What I mean, it's rather rough work for ladies."

"You're from Halfa, I suppose?" asked the Colonel.

"No, we're from the other show. We're the Sarras crowd, you know. We met in the desert, and we headed 'em off, and the other Johnnies herded them behind. We've got 'em on toast, I tell you. Get up on that rock and you'll see things happen. It's going to be a knockout in one round this time."

"We left some of our people at the wells. We are very uneasy about them," said the Colonel. "I suppose you have not heard anything of them?"

The young officer looked serious and shook his

head. "Bad job that!" said he. "They're a poisonous crowd when you put 'em in a corner. What I mean, we never expected to see you alive; and we're very glad to pull any of you out of the fire. The most we hoped was that we might revenge you."

"Any other Englishman with you?"

"Archer is with the flanking party. He'll have to come past, for I don't think there is any other way down. We've got one of your chaps up there —a funny old bird with a red top-knot. See you later, I hope! Good day, ladies!" He touched his helmet, tapped his camel, and trotted on after his men.

"We can't do better than stay where we are until they are all past," said the Colonel, for it was evident now that the men from above would have to come round. In a broken single file they went past, black men and brown, Soudanese and fellaheen, but all of the best, for the Camel Corps is the *corps d'élite* of the Egyptian army. Each had a brown bandolier over his chest and his rifle held across his thigh. A large man with a drooping black moustache and a pair of binoculars in his hand was riding at the side of them.

"Hulloa, Archer!" croaked the Colonel.

The officer looked at him with the vacant, unresponsive eye of a complete stranger.

"I'm Cochrane, you know! We travelled up together."

"Excuse me, sir, but you have the advantage of me," said the officer. "I knew a Colonel Cochrane Cochrane, but you are not the man. He was three inches taller than you, with black hair and——"

"That's all right," cried the Colonel, testily. "You try a few days with the Dervishes, and see if your friends will recognise you!"

"Good God, Cochrane, is it really you? I could not have believed it. Great Scott, what you must have been through! I've heard before of fellows going grey in a night, but, by Jove——"

"Quite so," said the Colonel, flushing. "Allow me to hint to you, Archer, that if you could get some food and drink for these ladies, instead of discussing my personal appearance, it would be much more practical."

"That's all right," said Captain Archer. "Your friend Stuart knows that you are here, and he is bringing some stuff round for you. Poor fare, ladies, but the best we have! You're an old soldier, Cochrane. Get up on the rocks presently, and you'll see a lovely sight. No time to stop, for we shall be in action again in five minutes. Anything I can do before I go?"

"You haven't got such a thing as a cigar?" asked the Colonel, wistfully.

Archer drew a thick satisfying partaga from his case and handed it down, with half-a-dozen wax vestas. Then he cantered after his men, and the old soldier leaned back against the rock and drew in the fragrant smoke. It was then that his jangled nerves knew the full virtue of tobacco, the gentle anodyne which stays the failing strength and soothes the worrying brain. He watched the dim, blue reek swirling up from him, and he felt the pleasant, aromatic bite upon his palate, while a restful languor crept over his weary and harassed body. The three ladies sat together upon a flat rock.

"Good land, what a sight you are, Sadie!" cried

Miss Adams, suddenly, and it was the first reappearance of her old self. "What *would* your mother say if she saw you? Why, sakes alive, your hair is full of straw and your frock clean crazy!"

"I guess we all want some setting to right," said Sadie, in a voice which was much more subdued than that of the Sadie of old. "Mrs. Belmont, you look just too perfectly sweet anyhow, but if you'll allow me, I'll fix your dress for you."

But Mrs. Belmont's eyes were far away, and she shook her head sadly as she gently put the girl's hands aside.

"I do not care how I look. I cannot think of it," said she; "could *you*, if you had left the man you love behind you, as I have mine?"

"I'm begin—beginning to think I have," sobbed poor Sadie, and buried her hot face in Mrs. Belmont's motherly bosom.

CHAPTER X

THE Camel Corps had all passed onward down the khor in pursuit of the retreating Dervishes, and for a few minutes the escaped prisoners had been left alone. But now there came a cheery voice calling upon them, and a red turban bobbed about among the rocks, with the large white face of the Nonconformist minister smiling from beneath it. He had a thick lance with which to support his injured leg, and this murderous crutch combined with his peaceful appearance to give him a most incongruous aspect,—as of a sheep which has suddenly developed claws. Behind him were two negroes with a basket and a water-skin.

"Not a word! Not a word!" he cried, as he stumped up to them. "I know exactly how you feel. I've been there myself. Bring the water, Ali! Only half a cup, Miss Adams; you shall have some more presently. Now your turn, Mrs. Belmont! Dear me, dear me, you poor souls, how my heart does bleed for you! There's bread and meat in the basket, but you must be very moderate at first." He chuckled with joy, and slapped his fat hands together as he watched them.

"But the others?" he asked, his face turning grave again.

The Colonel shook his head. "We left them behind at the wells. I fear that it is all over with them."

"Tut, tut!" cried the clergyman, in a boisterous

voice, which could not cover the despondency of his expression; "you thought, no doubt, that it was all over with me, but here I am in spite of it. Never lose heart, Mrs. Belmont. Your husband's position could not possibly be as hopeless as mine was."

"When I saw you standing on that rock up yonder, I put it down to delirium," said the Colonel. "If the ladies had not seen you, I should never have ventured to believe it."

"I am afraid that I behaved very badly. Captain Archer says that I nearly spoiled all their plans, and that I deserved to be tried by a drumhead court-trial and shot. The fact is that, when I heard the Arabs beneath me, I forgot myself in my anxiety to know if any of you were left."

"I wonder that you were not shot without any drumhead court-martial," said the Colonel. "But how in the world did you get here?"

"The Halfa people were close upon our track at the time when I was abandoned, and they picked me up in the desert. I must have been delirious, I suppose, for they tell me that they heard my voice, singing hymns, a long way off, and it was that, under the providence of God, which brought them to me. They had a camel ambulance, and I was quite myself again by next day. I came with the Sarras people after we met them, because they have the doctor with them. My wound is nothing, and he says that a man of my habit will be the better for the loss of blood. And now, my friends," —his big, brown eyes lost their twinkle, and became very solemn and reverent,—"we have all been upon the very confines of death, and our dear companions may be so at this instant. The same

power which saved us may save them, and let us pray together that it may be so, always remembering that if, in spite of our prayers, it should *not* be so, then that also must be accepted as the best and wisest thing."

So they knelt together among the black rocks, and prayed as some of them had never prayed before. It was very well to discuss prayer and treat it lightly and philosophically upon the deck of the *Korosko*. It was easy to feel strong and self-confident in the comfortable deck-chair, with the slippered Arab handing round the coffee and liqueurs. But they had been swept out of that placid stream of existence, and dashed against the horrible, jagged facts of life. Battered and shaken, they must have something to cling to. A blind, inexorable destiny was too horrible a belief. A chastening power, acting intelligently and for a purpose,—a living, working power, tearing them out of their grooves, breaking down their small sectarian ways, forcing them into the better path,—that was what they had learned to realise during these days of horror. Great hands had closed suddenly upon them and had moulded them into new shapes, and fitted them for new uses. Could such a power be deflected by any human supplication? It was that or nothing, —the last court of appeal, left open to injured humanity. And so they all prayed, as lover loves, or a poet writes, from the very inside of their souls, and they rose with that singular, illogical feeling of inward peace and satisfaction which prayer only can give.

"Hush!" said Cochrane. "Listen!"

The sound of a volley came crackling up the narrow khor, and then another and another. The

Colonel was fidgeting about like an old horse which hears the bugle of the hunt and the yapping of the pack.

"Where can we see what is going on?"

"Come this way! This way, if you please! There is a path up to the top. If the ladies will come after me, they will be spared the sight of anything painful."

The clergyman led them along the side to avoid the bodies which were littered thickly down the bottom of the khor. It was hard walking over the shingly, slaggy stones, but they made their way to the summit at last. Beneath them lay the vast expanse of the rolling desert, and in the foreground such a scene as none of them are ever likely to forget. In that perfectly dry and clear light, with the unvarying brown tint of the hard desert as a background, every detail stood out as clearly as if these were toy figures arranged upon a table within hand's touch of them.

The Dervishes—or what was left of them—were riding slowly some little distance out in a confused crowd, their patchwork jibbehs and red turbans swaying with the motion of their camels. They did not present the appearance of men who were defeated, for their movements were very deliberate, but they looked about them and changed their formation as if they were uncertain what their tactics ought to be. It was no wonder that they were puzzled, for upon their spent camels their situation was as hopeless as could be conceived. The Sarras men had all emerged from the khor, and had dismounted, the beasts being held in groups of four, while the riflemen knelt in a long line with a woolly, curling fringe of smoke, sending volley after volley

at the Arabs, who shot back in a desultory fashion from the backs of their camels. But it was not upon the sullen group of Dervishes, nor yet upon the long line of kneeling riflemen, that the eyes of the spectators were fixed. Far out upon the desert, three squadrons of the Halfa Camel Corps were coming up in a dense close column, which wheeled beautifully into a widespread semicircle as it approached. The Arabs were caught between two fires.

"By Jove!" cried the Colonel. "See that!"

The camels of the Dervishes had all knelt down simultaneously, and the men had sprung from their backs. In front of them was a tall, stately figure, who could only be the Emir Wad Ibrahim. They saw him kneel for an instant in prayer. Then he rose, and taking something from his saddle he placed it very deliberately upon the sand and stood upon it.

"Good man!" cried the Colonel. "He is standing upon his sheepskin."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Stuart.

"Every Arab has a sheepskin upon his saddle. When he recognises that his position is perfectly hopeless, and yet is determined to fight to the death, he takes his sheepskin off and stands upon it until he dies. See, they are all upon their sheepskins. They will neither give nor take quarter now."

The drama beneath them was rapidly approaching its climax. The Halfa Corps was well up, and a ring of smoke and flame surrounded the clump of kneeling Dervishes, who answered it as best they could. Many of them were already down, but the rest loaded and fired with the unflinching

courage which has always made them worthy antagonists. A dozen kharki-dressed figures upon the sand showed that it was no bloodless victory for the Egyptians. But now there was a stirring bugle-call from the Sarras men, and another answered it from the Halfa Corps. Their camels were down also, and the men had formed up into a single long curved line. One last volley and they were charging inward with the wild inspiriting yell which the blacks had brought with them from their central African wilds. For a minute there was a mad vortex of rushing figures, rifle-butts rising and falling, spear-heads gleaming and darting among the rolling dust cloud. Then the bugle rang out once more, the Egyptians fell back and formed up with the quick precision of highly disciplined troops, and there in the centre, each upon his sheepskin, lay the gallant barbarian and his raiders. The nineteenth century had been revenged upon the seventh.

The three women had stared horror-stricken and yet fascinated at the stirring scene before them. Now Sadie and her aunt were sobbing together. The Colonel had turned to them with some cheering words when his eyes fell upon the face of Mrs. Belmont. It was as white and set as if it were carved from ivory, and her large grey eyes were fixed as if she were in a trance.

"Good Heavens, Mrs. Belmont, what *is* the matter?" he cried.

For answer she pointed out over the desert. Far away, miles on the other side of the scene of the fight, a small body of men was riding toward them.

"By Jove, yes; there's someone there. Who can it be?"

They were all straining their eyes, but the distance was so great that they could only be sure that they were camel-men and about a dozen in number.

"It's those devils who were left behind in the palm-grove," said Cochrane. "There's no one else it can be. One consolation, they can't get away again. They've walked right into the lion's mouth."

But Mrs. Belmont was still gazing with the same fixed intensity and the same ivory face. Now, with a wild shriek of joy, she threw her two hands into the air. "It's they!" she screamed. "They are saved! It's they, Colonel, it's they! O Miss Adams, Miss Adams, it is they!" She capered about on the top of the hill with wild eyes like an excited child.

Her companions would not believe her, for they could see nothing, but there are moments when our mortal senses are more acute than those who have never put their whole heart and soul into them can ever realise. Mrs. Belmont had already run down the rocky path, on the way to her camel, before they could distinguish that which had long before carried its glad message to her. In the van of the approaching party, three white dots shimmered in the sun, and they could only come from the three European hats. The riders were travelling swiftly, and by the time their comrades had started to meet them they could plainly see that it was indeed Belmont, Fardet, and Stephens, with the dragoman Mansoor, and the wounded Soudanese rifleman. As they came together they saw that their escort consisted of Tippy Tilly and the other old Egyptian soldiers. Belmont rushed onward to meet

his wife, but Fardet stopped to grasp the Colonel's hand.

"*Vive la France! Vivent les Anglais!*" he was yelling. "*Tout va bien, n'est ce pas,* Colonel? Ah, *canaille! Vivent la croix et les Chrétiens!*" He was incoherent in his delight.

The Colonel, too, was as enthusiastic as his Anglo-Saxon standard would permit. He could not gesticulate, but he laughed in the nervous, crackling way which was his top-note of emotion.

"My dear boy, I am deuced glad to see you all again. I gave you up for lost. Never was so pleased at anything in my life! How did you get away?"

"It was all your doing."

"Mine?"

"Yes, my friend, and I have been quarrelling with you,—ungrateful wretch that I am!"

"But how did I save you?"

"It was you who arranged with this excellent Tippy Tilly and the others that they should have so much if they brought us alive into Egypt again. They slipped away in the darkness and hid themselves in the grove. Then, when we were left, they crept up with their rifles and shot the men who were about to murder us. That cursed Moolah, I am sorry they shot him, for I believe that I could have persuaded him to be a Christian. And now, with your permission, I will hurry on and embrace Miss Adams, for Belmont has his wife, and Stephens has Miss Sadie, so I think it is very evident that the sympathy of Miss Adams is reserved for me."

A fortnight had passed away, and the special boat which had been placed at the disposal of the

rescued tourists was already far north of Assiout. Next morning they would find themselves at Baliani, where one takes the express for Cairo. It was, therefore, their last evening together. Mrs. Shlesinger and her child who had escaped unhurt had already been sent down from the frontier. Miss Adams had been very ill after her privations, and this was the first time that she had been allowed to come up on deck after dinner. She sat now in a lounge-chair, thinner, sterner, and kindlier than ever, while Sadie stood beside her and tucked the rugs around her shoulders. Mr. Stephens was carrying over the coffee and placing it on the wicker-table beside them. On the other side of the deck Belmont and his wife were seated together in silent sympathy and contentment. Monsieur Fardet was leaning against the rail and arguing about the remissness of the British Government in not taking a more complete control of the Egyptian frontier, while the Colonel stood very erect in front of him, with the red end of a cigar-stump protruding from under his moustache.

But what was the matter with the Colonel? Who would have recognised him who had only seen the broken old man in the Libyan desert? There might be some little grizzling about the moustache, but the hair was back once more at the fine glossy black which had been so much admired upon the voyage up. With a stony face and an unsympathetic manner he had received, upon his return to Halfa, all the commiserations about the dreadful way in which his privations had blanched him, and then diving into his cabin, he had reappeared within an hour exactly as he had been before that fatal moment when he had been cut off from

the manifold resources of civilisation. And he looked in such a sternly questioning manner at every one who stared at him, that no one had the moral courage to make any remark about this modern miracle. It was observed from that time forward that, if the Colonel had only to ride a hundred yards into the desert, he always began his preparations by putting a small black bottle with a pink label into the side-pocket of his coat. But those who knew him best at times when a man may be best known, said that the old soldier had a young man's heart and a young man's spirit,—so that if he wished to keep a young man's colour also it was not very unreasonable after all.

It was very soothing and restful up there on the saloon deck, with no sound but the gentle lipping of the water as it rippled against the sides of the steamer. The red after-glow was in the western sky, and it mottled the broad, smooth river with crimson. Dimly they could discern the tall figures of herons standing upon the sand-banks, and farther off the line of river-side date-palms glided past them in a majestic procession. Once more the silver stars were twinkling out, the same clear, placid, inexorable stars to which their weary eyes had been so often upturned during the long nights of their desert martyrdom.

"Where do you put up in Cairo, Miss Adams?" asked Mrs. Belmont, at last.

"Shepheard's, I think."

"And you, Mr. Stephens?"

"Oh, Shepheard's, decidedly."

"We are staying at the Continental. I hope we shall not lose sight of you."

"I don't want ever to lose sight of you, Mrs.

Belmont," cried Sadie. "Oh, you must come to the States, and we'll give you just a lovely time."

Mrs. Belmont laughed, in her pleasant, mellow fashion.

"We have our duty to do in Ireland, and we have been too long away from it already. My husband has his business, and I have my home, and they are both going to rack and ruin. Besides," she added, slyly, "it is just possible that if we did come to the States we might not find you there."

"We must all meet again," said Belmont, "if only to talk our adventures over once more. It will be easier in a year or two. We are still too near them."

"And yet how far away and dream-like it all seems!" remarked his wife. "Providence is very good in softening disagreeable remembrances in our minds. All this feels to me as if it had happened in some previous existence."

Fardet held up his wrist with a cotton bandage still round it.

"The body does not forget as quickly as the mind. This does not look very dream-like or far away, Mrs. Belmont."

"How hard it is that some should be spared, and some not! If only Mr. Brown and Mr. Headingly were with us, then I should not have one care in the world," cried Sadie. "Why should they have been taken, and we left?"

Mr. Stuart had limped on to the deck with an open book in his hand, a thick stick supporting his injured leg.

"Why is the ripe fruit picked, and the unripe

left?" said he in answer to the young girl's exclamation. "We know nothing of the spiritual state of these poor dear young fellows, but the great Master Gardener plucks His fruit according to His own knowledge. I brought you up a passage to read to you."

There was a lantern upon the table, and he sat down beside it. The yellow light shone upon his heavy cheek and the red edges of his book. The strong, steady voice rose above the wash of the water.

"'Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed and delivered from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. They went astray in the wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. So they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to the city where they dwelt. Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men.'

"It sounds as if it were composed for us, and yet it was written two thousand years ago," said the clergyman, as he closed the book. "In every age man has been forced to acknowledge the guiding hand which leads him. For my part I don't believe that inspiration stopped two thousand years ago. When Tennyson wrote with such fervour and conviction,—

'Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,'

he was repeating the message which had been given to him, just as Micah or Ezekiel when the world was younger repeated some cruder and more elementary lesson."

"That is all very well, Mr. Stuart," said the Frenchman; "you ask me to praise God for taking me out of danger and pain, but what I want to know is why, since He has arranged all things, He ever put me into that pain and danger. I have in my opinion more occasion to blame than to praise. You would not thank me for pulling you out of that river if it was also I who pushed you in. The most which you can claim for your Providence is that it has healed the wound which its own hand inflicted."

"I don't deny the difficulty," said the clergyman, slowly; "no one who is not self-deceived *can* deny the difficulty. Look how boldly Tennyson faced it in that same poem, the grandest and deepest and most obviously inspired in our language. Remember the effect which it had upon him.

> 'I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar stairs,
> Which slope through darkness up to God,
>
> 'I stretch lame hands of faith and grope
> And gather dust and chaff, and call
> To what I feel is Lord of all,
> And faintly trust the larger hope.'

It is the central mystery of mysteries—the problem of sin and suffering, the one huge difficulty which the reasoner has to solve in order to vindicate the dealings of God with man. But take our own case

as an example. I, for one, am very clear what I have got out of our experience. I say it with all humility, but I have a clearer view of my duties than ever I had before. It has taught me to be less remiss in saying what I think to be true, less indolent in doing what I feel to be rightful."

"And I," cried Sadie. "It has taught me more than all my life put together. I have learned so much and unlearned so much. I am a different girl."

"I never understood my own nature before," said Stephens. "I can hardly say that I had a nature to understand. I lived for what was unimportant, and I neglected what was vital."

"Oh, a good shake-up does nobody any harm," the Colonel remarked. "Too much of the feather-bed-and-four-meals-a-day life is not good for man or woman."

"It is my firm belief," said Mrs. Belmont, gravely, "that there was not one of us who did not rise to a greater height during those days in the desert than ever before or since. When our sins come to be weighed, much may be forgiven us for the sake of those unselfish days."

They all sat in thoughtful silence for a little while the scarlet streaks turned to carmine, and the grey shadows deepened, and the wild-fowl flew past in dark straggling V's over the dull metallic surface of the great smooth-flowing Nile. A cold wind had sprung up from the eastward, and some of the party rose to leave the deck. Stephens leaned forward to Sadie.

"Do you remember what you promised when you were in the desert?" he whispered.

"What was that?"

"You said that if you escaped you would try in future to make some one else happy."

"Then I must do so."

"You have," said he, and their hands met under the shadow of the table.

THE END

THE GREEN FLAG AND OTHER STORIES OF WAR AND SPORT

THE GREEN FLAG

WHEN Jack Conolly, of the Irish Shotgun Brigade, the Rory of the Hills Inner Circle, and the extreme left wing of the Land League, was incontinently shot by Sergeant Murdoch of the constabulary, in a little moonlight frolic near Kanturk, his twin brother Dennis joined the British Army. The countryside had become too hot for him; and, as the seventy-five shillings were wanting which might have carried him to America, he took the only way handy of getting himself out of the way. Seldom has Her Majesty had a less promising recruit, for his hot Celtic blood seethed with hatred against Britain and all things British. The Sergeant, however, smiling complacently over his six feet of brawn and his forty-four-inch chest, whisked him off with a dozen other of the boys to the depôt at Fermoy, whence in a few weeks they were sent on, with the spade-work kinks taken out of their backs, to the first battalion of the Royal Mallows, at the top of the roster for foreign service.

The Royal Mallows, at about that date, were as strange a lot of men as ever were paid by a great empire to fight its battles. It was the darkest hour of the land struggle, when the one side came out with crowbar and battering-ram by day, and the other with mask and with shot-gun by night. Men driven from their homes and potato-patches found their way even into the service of the Government, to which it seemed to them that they owed their

troubles, and now and then they did wild things before they came. There were recruits in the Irish regiments who would forget to answer to their own names, so short had been their acquaintance with them. Of these the Royal Mallows had their full share; and, while they still retained their fame as being one of the smartest corps in the Army, no one knew better than their officers that they were dry-rotted with treason and with bitter hatred of the flag under which they served.

And the centre of all the disaffection was C Company, in which Dennis Conolly found himself enrolled. They were Celts, Catholics, and men of the tenant class to a man; and their whole experience of the British Government had been an inexorable landlord, and a constabulary who seemed to them to be always on the side of the rent-collector. Dennis was not the only moonlighter in the ranks, nor was he alone in having an intolerable family blood-feud to harden his heart. Savagery had begotten savagery in that veiled civil war. A landlord with an iron mortgage weighing down upon him had small bowels for his tenantry. He did but take what the law allowed; and yet, with men like Jim Holan, or Patrick McQuire, or Peter Flynn, who had seen the roofs torn from their cottages and their folk huddled among their pitiable furniture upon the roadside, it was ill to argue about abstract law. What matter that in that long and bitter struggle there was many another outrage on the part of the tenant, and many another grievance on the side of the landowner! A stricken man can only feel his own wound, and the rank and file of the C Company of the Royal Mallows were sore and savage to the soul. There were low whisper-

ings in barrack-rooms and canteens, stealthy meetings in public-house parlours, bandying of passwords from mouth to mouth, and many other signs which made their officers right glad when the order came which sent them to foreign, and better still to active service.

For Irish regiments have before now been disaffected, and have at a distance looked upon the foe as though he might, in truth, be the friend; but when they have been put face on to him, and when their officers have dashed to the front with a wave and a halloo, those rebel hearts have softened and their gallant Celtic blood has boiled with the mad joy of fight, until the slower Britons have marvelled that they ever could have doubted the loyalty of their Irish comrades. So it would be again, according to the officers, and so it would not be if Dennis Conolly and a few others could have their way.

It was a March morning upon the eastern fringe of the Nubian desert. The sun had not yet risen; but a tinge of pink flushed up as far as the cloudless zenith, and the long strip of sea lay like a rosy ribbon across the horizon. From the coast inland stretched dreary sand-plains, dotted over with thick clumps of mimosa scrub and mottled patches of thorny bush. No tree broke the monotony of that vast desert. The dull, dusty hue of the thickets and the yellow glare of the sand were the only colours, save at one point where, from a distance, it seemed that a landslip of snow-white stones had shot itself across a low foot-hill. But as the traveller approached he saw, with a thrill, that these were no stones, but the bleaching bones of a slaughtered

army. With its dull tints, its gnarled viprous bushes, its arid, barren soil, and this death-streak trailed across it, it was indeed a nightmare country.

Some eight or ten miles inland the rolling plain curved upward with a steeper slope until it ran into a line of red basaltic rock which zigzagged from north to south, heaping itself up at one point into a fantastic knoll. On the summit of this there stood upon that March morning three Arab chieftains—the Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowas, Moussa Wad Aburhegel, who led the Berber Dervishes, and Hamid Wad Hussein, who had come northward with his fighting men from the land of the Baggaras. They had all three just risen from their praying-carpets, and were peering out, with fierce, high-nosed faces thrust forward, at the stretch of country revealed by the spreading dawn.

The red rim of the sun was pushing itself now above the distant sea, and the whole coast-line stood out brilliantly yellow against the rich deep blue beyond. At one spot lay a huddle of white-walled houses, a mere splotch in the distance; while four tiny cock-boats, which lay beyond, marked the position of three of Her Majesty's ten-thousand-ton troopers and the Admiral's flagship. But it was not upon the distant town, nor upon the great vessels, nor yet upon the sinister white litter which gleamed in the plain beneath them, that the Arab chieftains gazed. Two miles from where they stood, amid the sand-hills and the mimosa scrub, a great parallelogram had been marked by piled-up bushes. From the inside of this dozens of tiny blue smoke-reeks curled up into the still morning air; while there rose from it

a confused deep murmur, the voices of men and the gruntings of camels blended into the same insect buzz.

"The unbelievers have cooked their morning food," said the Baggara chief, shading his eyes with his tawny, sinewy hand. "Truly their sleep has been but scanty; for Hamid and a hundred of his men have fired upon them since the rising of the moon."

"So it was with these others," answered the Sheik Kadra, pointing with his sheathed sword toward the old battle-field. "They also had a day of little water and a night of little rest, and the heart was gone out of them ere ever the sons of the Prophet had looked them in the eyes. This blade drank deep that day, and will again before the sun has travelled from the sea to the hill."

"And yet these are other men," remarked the Berber Dervish. "Well, I know that Allah has placed them in the clutch of our fingers, yet it may be that they with the big hats will stand firmer than the cursed men of Egypt."

"Pray Allah that it may be so," cried the fierce Baggara, with a flash of his black eyes. "It was not to chase women that I brought seven hundred men from the river to the coast. See, my brother, already they are forming their array."

A fanfare of bugle-calls burst from the distant camp. At the same time the bank of bushes at one side had been thrown or trampled down, and the little army within began to move slowly out on to the plain. Once clear of the camp they halted, and the slant rays of the sun struck flashes from bayonet and from gun-barrel as the ranks closed up until the big pith helmets joined into a

single long white ribbon. Two streaks of scarlet glowed on either side of the square, but elsewhere the fringe of fighting-men was of the dull yellow khaki tint which hardly shows against the desert sand. Inside their array was a dense mass of camels and mules bearing stores and ambulance needs. Outside a twinkling clump of cavalry was drawn up on each flank, and in front a thin scattered line of mounted infantry was already slowly advancing over the bush-strewn plain, halting on every eminence, and peering warily round as men might who have to pick their steps among the bones of those who have preceded them.

The three chieftains still lingered upon the knoll, looking down with hungry eyes and compressed lips at the dark steel-tipped patch.

"They are slower to start than the men of Egypt," the Sheik of the Hadendowas growled in his beard.

"Slower also to go back, perchance, my brother," murmured the Dervish. "And yet they are not many—three thousand at the most."

"And we ten thousand, with the Prophet's grip upon our spear-hafts and his words upon our banner. See to their chieftain, how he rides upon the right and looks up at us with the glass that sees from afar! It may be that he sees this also." The Arab shook his sword at the small clump of horsemen who had spurred out from the square.

"Lo! he beckons," cried the Dervish; "and see those others at the corner, how they bend and heave. Ha! by the Prophet, I had thought it."

As he spoke a little woolly puff of smoke spurted up at the corner of the square, and a seven-pound shell burst with a hard metallic smack just over

their heads. The splinters knocked chips from the red rocks around them.

"Bismillah!" cried the Hadendowa; "if the gun can carry thus far, then ours can answer to it. Ride to the left, Moussa, and tell Ben Ali to cut the skin from the Egyptians if they cannot hit yonder mark. And you, Hamid, to the right, and see that three thousand men lie close in the wady that we have chosen. Let the others beat the drum and show the banner of the Prophet; for by the black stone their spears will have drunk deep ere they look upon the stars again."

A long, straggling, boulder-strewn plateau lay on the summit of the red hills, sloping very precipitously to the plain, save at one point, where a winding gully curved downward, its mouth choked with sand-mounds and olive-hued scrub. Along the edge of this position lay the Arab host, a motley crew of shock-headed desert clansmen, fierce predatory slave-dealers of the interior, and wild Dervishes from the Upper Nile, all blent together by their common fearlessness and fanaticism. Two races were there, as wide as the poles apart, the thin-lipped, straight-haired Arab, and the thick-lipped, curly negro; yet the faith of Islam had bound them closer than a blood tie. Squatting among the rocks, or lying thickly in the shadow, they peered out at the slow-moving square beneath them, while women with water-skins and bags of dhoora fluttered from group to group, calling out to each other those fighting texts from the Koran which in the hour of battle are maddening as wine to the true believer. A score of banners waved over the ragged, valiant crew, and among them, upon desert horses and white Bishareen camels,

were the Emirs and Sheiks who were to lead them against the infidels.

As the Sheik Kadra sprang into his saddle and drew his sword there was a wild whoop and a clatter of waving spears, while the one-ended war-drums burst into a dull crash like a wave upon shingle. For a moment ten thousand men were up on the rocks with brandished arms and leaping figures; the next they were under cover, again waiting sternly and silently for their chieftain's orders. The square was less than half a mile from the ridge now, and shell after shell from the seven-pound guns were pitching over it. A deep roar on the right, and then a second one showed that the Egyptian Krupps were in action. Sheik Kadra's hawk eyes saw that the shells burst far beyond the mark, and he spurred his horse along to where a knot of mounted chiefs were gathered round the two guns, which were served by their captured crews.

"How is this, Ben Ali?" he cried. "It was not thus that the dogs fired when it was their own brothers in faith at whom they aimed!"

A chieftain reined his horse back, and thrust a blood-smeared sword into its sheath. Beside him two Egyptian artillerymen with their throats cut were sobbing out their lives upon the ground.

"Who lays the gun this time?" asked the fierce chief, glaring at the frightened gunners. "Here, thou black-browed child of Shaitan, aim, and aim for thy life."

It may have been chance, or it may have been skill, but the third and fourth shells burst over the square. Sheik Kadra smiled grimly and galloped back to the left, where his spearmen were stream-

ing down into the gully. As he joined them a deep growling rose from the plain beneath, like the snarling of a sullen wild beast, and a little knot of tribesmen fell in a struggling heap, caught in the blast of lead from a Gardner. Their comrades pressed on over them, and sprang down into the ravine. From all along the crest burst the hard sharp crackle of Remington fire.

The square had slowly advanced, rippling over the low sand-hills, and halting every few minutes to rearrange its formation. Now, having made sure that there was no force of the enemy in the scrub, it changed its direction, and began to take a line parallel to the Arab position. It was too steep to assail from the front, and if they moved far enough to the right the General hoped that he might turn it. On the top of those ruddy hills lay a baronetcy for him, and a few extra hundreds in his pension, and he meant having them both that day. The Remington fire was annoying, and so were those two Krupp guns: already there were more cacolets full than he cared to see. But on the whole he thought it better to hold his fire until he had more to aim at than a few hundred of fuzzy heads peeping over a razor-back ridge. He was a bulky, red-faced man, a fine whist-player, and a soldier who knew his work. His men believed in him, and he had good reason to believe in them, for he had excellent stuff under him that day. Being an ardent champion of the short-service system, he took particular care to work with veteran first battalions, and his little force was the compressed essence of an army corps.

The left front of the square was formed by four companies of the Royal Wessex, and the right by

four of the Royal Mallows. On either side the other halves of the same regiments marched in quarter column of companies. Behind them, on the right was a battalion of Guards, and on the left one of Marines, while the rear was closed in by a Rifle battalion. Two Royal Artillery seven-pound screw-guns kept pace with the square, and a dozen white-bloused sailors, under their blue-coated, tight-waisted officers, trailed their Gardner in front, turning every now and then to spit up at the draggled banners which waved over the cragged ridge. Hussars and Lancers scouted in the scrub at each side, and within moved the clump of camels, with humorous eyes and supercilious lips, their comic faces a contrast to the blood-stained men who already lay huddled in the cacolets on either side.

The square was now moving slowly on a line parallel with the rocks, stopping every few minutes to pick up wounded, and to allow the screw-guns and Gardner to make themselves felt. The men looked serious, for that spring on to the rocks of the Arab army had given them a vague glimpse of the number and ferocity of their foes; but their faces were set like stone, for they knew to a man that they must win or they must die—and die, too, in a particularly unlovely fashion. But most serious of all was the General, for he had seen that which brought a flush to his cheeks and a frown to his brow.

"I say, Stephen," said he to his galloper, "those Mallows seem a trifle jumpy. The right flank company bulged a bit when the niggers showed on the hill."

"Youngest troops in the square, sir," murmured

the aide, looking at them critically through his eyeglass.

"Tell Colonel Flanagan to see to it, Stephen," said the General; and the galloper sped upon his way. The Colonel, a fine old Celtic warrior, was over at C Company in an instant.

"How are the men, Captain Foley?"

"Never better, sir," answered the senior captain in the spirit that makes a Madras officer look murder if you suggest recruiting his regiment from the Punjaub.

"Stiffen them up!" cried the Colonel. As he rode away a colour-sergeant seemed to trip, and fell forward into a mimosa bush.

He made no effort to rise, but lay in a heap among the thorns.

"Sergeant O'Rooke's gone, sorr," cried a voice.

"Never mind, lads," said Captain Foley. "He's died like a soldier, fighting for his Queen."

"To hell with the Queen!" shouted a hoarse voice from the ranks.

But the roar of the Gardner and the typewriter-like clicking of the hopper burst in at the tail of the words. Captain Foley heard them, and Subalterns Grice and Murphy heard them; but there are times when a deaf ear is a gift from the gods.

"Steady, Mallows!" cried the Captain, in a pause of the grunting machine-gun. "We have the honour of Ireland to guard this day."

"And well we know how to guard it, Captin!" cried the same ominous voice; and there was a buzz from the length of the company.

The Captain and the two subs. came together behind the marching line.

"They seem a bit out of hand," murmured the Captain.

"Bedad," said the Galway boy, "they mean to scoot like redshanks."

"They nearly broke when the blacks showed on the hill," said Grice.

"The first man that turns, my sword is through him," cried Foley, loud enough to be heard by five files on either side of him. Then, in a lower voice, "It's a bitter drop to swallow, but it's my duty to report what you think to the Chief and have a company of Jollies put behind us." He turned away with the safety of the square upon his mind, and before he had reached his goal the square had ceased to exist.

In their march in front of what looked like a face of cliff, they had come opposite to the mouth of the gully, in which, screened by scrub and boulders, three thousand chosen Dervishes, under Hamid Wad Hussein of the Baggaras, were crouching. Tat, tat, tat, went the rifles of three mounted infantrymen in front of the left shoulder of the square, and an instant later they were spurring it for their lives, crouching over the manes of their horses, and pelting over the sand-hills with thirty or forty galloping chieftains at their heels. Rocks and scrub and mimosa swarmed suddenly into life. Rushing black figures came and went in the gaps of the bushes. A howl that drowned the shouts of the officers, a long quavering yell, burst from the ambuscade. Two rolling volleys from the Royal Wessex, one crash from the screw-gun firing shrapnel, and then before a second cartridge could be rammed in, a living, glistening black wave

tipped with steel, had rolled over the gun, the Royal Wessex had been dashed back among the camels, and a thousand fanatics were hewing and hacking in the heart of what had been the square.

The camels and mules in the centre, jammed more and more together as their leaders flinched from the rush of the tribesmen, shut out the view of the other three faces, who could only tell that the Arabs had got in by the yells upon Allah, which rose ever nearer and nearer amid the clouds of sand-dust, the struggling animals, and the dense mass of swaying, cursing men. Some of the Wessex fired back at the Arabs who had passed them, as excited Tommies will, and it is whispered among doctors that it was not always a Remington bullet which was cut from a wound that day. Some rallied in little knots, stabbing furiously with their bayonets at the rushing spearmen. Others turned at bay with their backs against the camels, and others round the General and his staff, who, revolver in hand, had flung themselves into the heart of it. But the whole square was sidling slowly away from the gorge, pushed back by the pressure at the shattered corner.

The officers and men at the other faces were glancing nervously to their rear, uncertain what was going on, and unable to take help to their comrades without breaking the formation.

"By Jove, they've got through the Wessex!" cried Grice of the Mallows.

"The divils have hurrooshed us, Ted," said his brother subaltern, cocking his revolver.

The ranks were breaking and crowding toward Private Conolly, all talking together as the officers peered back through the veil of dust. The sailors

had run their Gardner out, and she was squirting death out of her five barrels into the flank of the rushing stream of savages.

"Oh, this bloody gun!" shouted a voice. "She's jammed again." The fierce metallic grunting had ceased, and her crew were straining and hauling at the breech.

"This damned vertical feed!" cried an officer. "The spanner, Wilson, the spanner! Stand to your cutlasses, boys, or they're into us."

His voice rose into a shriek as he ended, for a shovel-headed spear had been buried in his chest. A second wave of Dervishes lapped over the hillocks, and burst upon the machine-gun and the right front of the line. The sailors were overborne in an instant, but the Mallows, with their fighting blood aflame, met the yell of the Moslem with an even wilder, fiercer cry, and dropped two hundred of them with a single point-blank volley. The howling, leaping crew swerved away to the right, and dashed on into the gap which had already been made for them.

But C Company had drawn no trigger to stop that fiery rush. The men leaned moodily upon their Martinis. Some had even thrown them upon the ground. Conolly was talking fiercely to those about him. Captain Foley, thrusting his way through the press, rushed up to him with a revolver in his hand.

"This is your doing, you villain!" he cried.

"If you raise your pistol, Captin, your brains will be over your coat," said a low voice at his side.

He saw that several rifles were turned on him. The two subs. had pressed forward, and were by his side.

"What is it, then?" he cried, looking round

from one fierce mutinous face to another. "Are you Irishmen? Are you soldiers? What are you here for but to fight for your country?"

"England is no country of ours," cried several.

"You are not fighting for England. You are fighting for Ireland, and for the Empire of which it is part."

"A black curse on the Impire!" shouted Private McQuire, throwing down his rifle. "'Twas the Impire that backed the man that druv me onto the roadside. May me hand stiffen before I draw thrigger for it."

"What's the Impire to us, Captain Foley, and what's the Widdy to us ayther?" cried a voice.

"Let the constabulary foight for her."

"Ay, be God, they'd be better imployed than pullin' a poor man's thatch about his ears."

"Or shootin' his brother, as they did mine."

"It was the Impire laid my groanin' mother by the wayside. Her son will rot before he upholds it, and ye can put that in the charge-sheet in the next coort-martial."

In vain the three officers begged, menaced, persuaded. The square was still moving, ever moving, with the same bloody fight raging in its entrails. Even while they had been speaking they had been shuffling backward, and the useless Gardner, with her slaughtered crew, was already a good hundred yards from them. And the pace was accelerating. The mass of men, tormented and writhing, was trying, by a common instinct, to reach some clearer ground where they could re-form. Three faces were still intact, but the fourth had been caved in, and badly mauled, without its comrades being able to help it. The Guards had met a fresh rush of

the Hadendowas, and had blown back the tribesmen with a volley, and the Cavalry had ridden over another stream of them, as they welled out of the gully. A litter of hamstrung horses, and haggled men behind them, showed that a spearman on his face among the bushes can show some sport to the man who charges him. But, in spite of all, the square was still reeling swiftly backward trying to shake itself clear of this torment which clung to its heart. Would it break, or would it re-form? The lives of five regiments and the honour of the flag hung upon the answer.

Some, at least, were breaking. The C Company of the Mallows had lost all military order and was pushing back in spite of the haggard officers, who cursed and shoved and prayed in the vain attempt to hold them. Their Captain and the subs. were elbowed and jostled, while the men crowded toward Private Conolly for their orders. The confusion had not spread, for the other companies, in the dust and smoke and turmoil, had lost touch with their mutinous comrades. Captain Foley saw that even now there might be time to avert a disaster.

"Think what you are doing, man," he yelled, rushing toward the ringleader. "There are a thousand Irish in the square, and they are dead men if we break."

The words alone might have had little effect on the old moonlighter. It is possible that, in his scheming brain, he had already planned how he was to club his Irish together and lead them to the sea. But at that moment the Arabs broke through the screen of camels which had fended them off. There was a struggle, a screaming, a mule rolled over, a wounded man sprang up in a cacolet with

a spear through him, and then through the narrow gap surged a stream of naked savages, mad with battle, drunk with slaughter, spotted and splashed with blood—blood dripping from their spears, their arms, their faces. Their yells, their bounds, their crouching, darting figures, the horrid energy of their spear-thrusts, made them look like a blast of fiends from the pit. And were these the Allies of Ireland? Were these the men who were to strike for her against her enemies? Conolly's soul rose up in loathing at the thought.

He was a man of firm purpose, and yet at the first sight of those howling fiends that purpose faltered, and at the second it was blown to the winds. He saw a huge coal-black negro seize a shrieking camel-driver and saw at his throat with a knife. He saw a shock-headed tribesman plunge his great spear through the back of their own little bugler from Millstreet. He saw a dozen deeds of blood—the murder of the wounded, the hacking of the unarmed—and caught, too, in a glance, the good wholesome faces of the faced-about rear rank of the Marines. The Mallows, too, had faced about, and in an instant Conolly had thrown himself into the heart of C Company, striving with the officers to form the men up with their comrades.

But the mischief had gone too far. The rank and file had no heart in their work. They had broken before, and this last rush of murderous savages was a hard thing for broken men to stand against. They flinched from the furious faces and dripping forearms. Why should they throw away their lives for a flag for which they cared nothing? Why should their leader urge them to break, and now shriek to them to re-form? They would not

re-form. They wanted to get to the sea and to safety. He flung himself among them with outstretched arms, with words of reason, with shouts, with gaspings. It was useless; the tide was beyond his control. They were shredding out into the desert with their faces set for the coast.

"Bhoys, will ye stand for this?" screamed a voice. It was so ringing, so strenuous, that the breaking Mallows glanced backward. They were held by what they saw. Private Conolly had planted his rifle-stock downward in a mimosa bush. From the fixed bayonet there fluttered a little green flag with the crownless harp. God knows for what black mutiny, for what signal of revolt, that flag had been treasured up within the Corporal's tunic! Now its green wisp stood amid the rush, while three proud regimental colours were reeling slowly backward.

"What for the flag?" yelled the private.

"My heart's blood for it! and mine! and mine!" cried a score of voices. "God bless it! The flag, boys—the flag!"

C Company were rallying upon it. The stragglers clutched at each other, and pointed. "Here, McQuire, Flynn, O'Hara," ran the shoutings. "Close on the flag! Back to the flag!" The three standards reeled backward, and the seething square strove for a clearer space where they could form their shattered ranks; but C Company, grim and powder-stained, choked with enemies and falling fast, still closed in on the little rebel ensign that flapped from the mimosa bush.

It was a good half-hour before the square, having disentangled itself from its difficulties and dressed its ranks, began to slowly move forward

over the ground, across which in its labour and anguish it had been driven. The long trail of Wessex men and Arabs showed but too clearly the path they had come.

"How many got into us, Stephen?" asked the General, tapping his snuff-box.

"I should put them down at a thousand or twelve hundred, sir."

"I did not see any get out again. What the devil were the Wessex thinking about? The Guards stood well, though; so did the Mallows."

"Colonel Flanagan reports that his front flank company was cut off, sir."

"Why, that's the Company that was out of hand when we advanced!"

"Colonel Flanagan reports, sir, that the Company took the whole brunt of the attack, and gave the square time to re-form."

"Tell the Hussars to ride forward, Stephen," said the General, "and try if they can see anything of them. There's no firing, and I fear that the Mallows will want to do some recruiting. Let the square take ground by the right, and then advance!"

But the Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowas saw from his knoll that the men with the big hats had rallied, and that they were coming back in the quiet business fashion of men whose work was before them. He took counsel with Moussa the Dervish and Hussein the Baggara, and a woestruck man was he when he learned that the third of his men were safe in the Moslem Paradise. So, having still some signs of victory to show, he gave the word, and the desert warriors flitted off unseen and unheard, even as they had come.

A red rock plateau, a few hundred spears and

Remingtons, and a plain which for the second time was strewn with slaughtered men, was all that his day's fighting gave to the English General.

It was a squadron of Hussars which came first to the spot where the rebel flag had waved. A dense litter of Arab dead marked the place. Within the flag waved no longer, but the rifle still stood in the mimosa bush, and round it, with their wounds in front, lay the Fenian private and the silent ranks of his Irishry. Sentiment is not an English failing, but the Hussar Captain raised his hilt in a salute as he rode past the blood-soaked ring.

The British General sent home dispatches to his Government, and so did the Chief of the Hadendowas to his, though the style and manner differed somewhat in each. "The Sheik Kadra of the Hadendowa people to Mohammed Ahmed, the chosen of Allah, homage and greeting," began the latter. "Know by this that on the fourth day of this moon we gave battle to the Kaffirs who call themselves Inglees, having with us the Chief Hussein with ten thousand of the faithful. By the blessing of Allah we have broken them, and chased them for a mile, though indeed these infidels are different from the dogs of Egypt, and have slain very many of our men. Yet we hope to smite them again ere the new moon be come, to which end I trust that thou wilt send us a thousand Dervishes from Omdurman. In token of our victory I send you by this messenger a flag which we have taken. By the colour it might well seem to have belonged to those of the true faith, but the Kaffirs gave their blood freely to save it, and so we think that, though small, it is very dear to them."

CAPTAIN SHARKEY

I

HOW THE GOVERNOR OF ST. KITT'S CAME HOME

WHEN the great wars of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing-fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation, they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship *Morning Star*, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt's was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the 20-gun pirate barque, *Happy Delivery*, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity.

CAPTAIN SHARKEY

From the Bahamas to the Main his coal black barque, with the ambiguous name, had been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship and her full and valuable lading that he struck out to the west as far as Bird's Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, "as provisions for the voyage," but the seaman had at once committed it to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame, until, at the last moment, the *Morning Star* had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought of him lay heavily upon the seaman's mind as he watched the agent's boat shooting out from the custom-house quay.

"I'll lay you a wager, Morgan," said he to the first mate, "that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips."

"Well, captain, I'll have you a silver dollar, and chance it," said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder.

"Welcome, Captain Scarrow!" he cried. "Have you heard about Sharkey?"

The captain grinned at the mate.

"What devilry has he been up to now?" he asked.

"Devilry! You've not heard, then! Why, we've got him safe under lock and key here at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning."

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

"Sharkey to be hanged!" he cried. "You don't know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?"

"Stand back!" cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. "I'll pay that dollar, Cap-

tain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?"

"Why, as to that, he became more than his own comrades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. 'He's my meat,' said he, 'and I claim the cooking of it.' If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you'll see the joint swinging."

"I wish I could," said the captain, wistfully, "but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide."

"That you can't do," said the agent with decision. "The governor is going back with you."

"The Governor!"

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains."

"Well, well!" cried the captain in some perplexity, "I'm a plain seaman, and I don't know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don't remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it's in King George's service, and he asks a cast in the *Morning Star* as far as London, I'll do what I can for him. There's my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it's lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week;

but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste."

"You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow," said the agent. "Sir Charles is in weak health just now, only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life into him. He has a great spirit in him, though, and you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech."

"He may say what he likes and do what he likes so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship," said the captain. "He is Governor of St. Kitt's, but I am Governor of the *Morning Star*. And, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George."

"He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves."

"The early morning tide, then."

"Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night, and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt's without seeing Sharkey do the rogue's hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey."

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the

Governor's baggage began to arrive—great iron-bound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or the sword within. And then there came a note, with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard that the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle's coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

"There is a keg of Trinidad."

"You play a hand at picquet?"

"Passably well, sir."

"Then up anchor, and to sea!"

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limped the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter-rail.

"You are on Government service now, captain," said he. "They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?"

"Every inch, Sir Charles."

"Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage."

"I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency's society," said the captain. "But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted."

"Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out."

"I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague."

"Yes; I have had a pyrexy, which has reduced me much."

"We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon."

"Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!"

He raised his ring-covered hand in the air. From far astern there came the low deep thunder of cannon.

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"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

Scarrow. "They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?"

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the Adjutant-General said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury were so foolish as to be visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head."

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink to a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on the top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off—the one to his watch and the other to his bunk. But when after his four hours' spell the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the *Morning Star* was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the

mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were half-way across the Atlantic he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet he would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sails and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman—he who had been cast away in the boat—should lead him about, and above all that he should sit beside him when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey, and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed forefinger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot

out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulder. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of a mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. "Give me a knife and a bucket!" he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt's, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the king's ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three

friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw his cards down, and swept all the money into the pocket of his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

"The game's mine!" said he.

"Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!" cried Captain Scarrow; "you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers."

"Sink you for a liar!" said the Governor. "I tell you that I *have* played out the hand, and that you *are* a loser." He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

"Good God!" cried the mate. "It's Sharkey!"

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh.

"Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen," said he, "and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the *Happy Delivery*. We made it hot, so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs—you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs—we hold you at the end of our pistols!"

"You may shoot, or you may not!" cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. "If it's my last breath, Sharkey, I tell

you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!"

"There's a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he's going to make a very pretty death of it!" cried Sharkey. "There's no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you'll need it soon. Is the dingey astern, Ned?"

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"And the other boats scuttled?"

"I bored them all in three places."

"Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow. You look as if you hadn't quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

"I believe you're the devil himself!" cried the captain. "Where is the Governor of St. Kitt's?"

"When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends—for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port—that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah, and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I have ruffled it as a governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them."

"Help! Help! Watch ahoy!" yelled the mate; but the butt of the pirate's pistol crashed down on to his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm around his waist.

"No use, Master Scarrow," said Sharkey. "Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life."

"I'll see you ——" cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

"Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?"

"No; not if you twist it off."

"Put an inch of your knife into him."

"You may put six inches, and then I won't."

"Sink me, but I like his spirit!" cried Sharkey. "Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You've saved your skin, Scarrow, and it's a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow, since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned."

"To the stove, captain?"

"Tut, tut! there's a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I'll let you know which of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table."

"Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!" said the quartermaster. "You surely do not mean to let him go?"

"If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?"

"Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!" said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spreadeagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed under-

neath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt's.

"Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you," said the pirate. "If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he has a barque he'll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own—so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the *Morning Star*."

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their footsteps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dingey hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

"Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage, Wilson!" he screamed. "Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dingey. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo'sun, and tumble into the boats all hands."

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed

the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

"The boats are scuttled!" they cried. "They are leaking like a sieve."

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net.

Close to them was the little dingey, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

"They are dead men!" cried the captain. "A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger."

But it was too late.

At that very moment the dingey shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence. The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

II

THE DEALINGS OF CAPTAIN SHARKEY WITH STEPHEN CRADDOCK

CAREENING was a very necessary operation for the old pirate. On his superior speed he depended both for overhauling the trader and escaping the man-of-war. But it was impossible to retain his sailing qualities unless he periodically—once a year, at the least—cleared his vessel's bottom from the long, trailing plants and crusting barnacles which gather so rapidly in the tropical seas.

For this purpose he lightened his vessel, thrust her into some narrow inlet where she would be left high and dry at low water, fastened blocks and tackles to her masts to pull her over on to her bilge, and then scraped her thoroughly from rudder-post to cutwater.

During the weeks which were thus occupied the ship was, of course, defenceless; but, on the other hand, she was unapproachable by anything heavier than an empty hull, and the place for careening was chosen with an eye to secrecy, so that there was no great danger.

So secure did the captains feel, that it was not uncommon for them, at such times, to leave their ships under a sufficient guard and to start off in the long-boat, either upon a sporting expedition or, more frequently, upon a visit to some outlying town, where they turned the heads of the women by their swaggering gallantry, or broached pipes of wine in the market square, with a threat to pistol all who would not drink with them.

Sometimes they would even appear in cities of the size of Charleston, and walk the streets with their clattering sidearms—an open scandal to the whole law-abiding colony. Such visits are not always paid with impunity. It was one of them, for example, which provoked Lieutenant Maynard to hack off Blackbeard's head, and to spear it upon the end of his bowsprit. But, as a rule, the pirate ruffled and bullied and drabbed without let or hindrance until it was time for him to go back to his ship once more.

There was one pirate, however, who never crossed even the skirts of civilisation, and that was the sinister Sharkey, of the barque *Happy Delivery*. It may have been from his morose and solitary temper, or, as is more probable, that he knew that his name upon the coast was such that outraged humanity would, against all odds, have thrown themselves upon him, but never once did he show his face in a settlement.

When his ship was laid up he would leave her under the charge of Ned Galloway—her New England quartermaster—and would take long voyages in his boat, sometimes, it was said, for the purpose of burying his share of the plunder, and sometimes to shoot the wild oxen of Hispaniola, which, when dressed and barbecued, provided provisions for his next voyage. In the latter case the barque would come round to some prearranged spot to pick him up and take on board what he had shot.

There had always been a hope in the islands that Sharkey might be taken on one of these occasions; and at last there came news to Kingston which seemed to justify an attempt upon him. It was brought by an elderly logwood-cutter who had

fallen into the pirate's hands, and in some freak of drunken benevolence had been allowed to get away with nothing worse than a slit nose and a drubbing. His account was recent and definite. The *Happy Delivery* was careening at Torbec on the south-west of Hispaniola. Sharkey, with four men, was buccaneering on the outlying island of La Vache. The blood of a hundred murdered crews was calling out for vengeance, and now at last it seemed as if it might not call in vain.

Sir Edward Compton, the high-nosed, red-faced Governor, sitting in solemn conclave with the commandant and the head of the council, was sorely puzzled in his mind as to how he should use this chance. There was no man-of-war nearer than Jamestown, and she was a clumsy old fly-boat, which could neither overhaul the pirate on the seas, nor reach her in a shallow inlet. There were forts and artillerymen both at Kingston and Port Royal, but no soldiers available for an expedition.

A private venture might be fitted out—and there were many who had a blood-feud with Sharkey,—but what could a private venture do? The pirates were numerous and desperate. As to taking Sharkey and his four companions, that, of course, would be easy if they could get at them; but how were they to get at them on a large well-wooded island like La Vache, full of wild hills and impenetrable jungles? A reward was offered to whoever could find a solution, and that brought a man to the front who had a singular plan, and was himself prepared to carry it out.

Stephen Craddock had been that most formidable person, the Puritan gone wrong. Sprung from a decent Salem family, his ill-doing seemed

to be a recoil from the austerity of their religion, and he brought to vice all the physical strength and energy with which the virtues of his ancestors had endowed him. He was ingenious, fearless, and exceedingly tenacious of purpose, so that when he was still young his name became notorious upon the American coast.

He was the same Craddock who was tried for his life in Virginia for the slaying of the Seminole Chief, and, though he escaped, it was well known that he had corrupted the witnesses and bribed the judge.

Afterward, as a slaver, and even, as it was hinted, as a pirate, he had left an evil name behind him in the Bight of Benin. Finally he had returned to Jamaica with a considerable fortune, and had settled down to a life of sombre dissipation. This was the man, gaunt, austere, and dangerous, who now waited upon the Governor with a plan for the extirpation of Sharkey.

Sir Edward received him with little enthusiasm, for in spite of some rumours of conversion and reformation, he had always regarded him as an infected sheep who might taint the whole of his little flock. Craddock saw the Governor's mistrust under his thin veil of formal and restrained courtesy.

"You've no call to fear me, sir," said he; "I'm a changed man from what you've known. I've seen the light again, of late, after losing sight of it for many a black year. It was through the ministration of the Rev. John Simons, of our own people. Sir, if your spirit should be in need of quickening, you would find a very sweet savour in his discourse."

The Governor cocked his Episcopalian nose at him.

"You came here to speak of Sharkey, Master Craddock," said he.

"The man Sharkey is a vessel of wrath," said Craddock. "His wicked horn has been exalted over long, and it is borne in upon me that if I can cut him off and utterly destroy him, it will be a goodly deed, and one which may atone for many backslidings in the past. A plan has been given to me whereby I may encompass his destruction."

The Governor was keenly interested, for there was a grim and practical air about the man's freckled face which showed that he was in earnest. After all, he was a seaman and a fighter, and, if it were true that he was eager to atone for his past, no better man could be chosen for the business.

"This will be a dangerous task, Master Craddock," said he.

"If I meet my death at it, it may be that it will cleanse the memory of an ill-spent life. I have much to atone for."

The Governor did not see his way to contradict him.

"What was your plan?" he asked.

"You have heard that Sharkey's barque, the *Happy Delivery*, came from this very port of Kingston?"

"It belonged to Mr. Codrington, and it was taken by Sharkey, who scuttled his own sloop and moved into her because she was faster," said Sir Edward.

"Yes; but it may be that you have never heard that Mr. Codrington has a sister ship, the *White Rose*, which lies even now in the harbour, and

which is so like the pirate, that, if it were not for a white paint line, none could tell them apart."

"Ah! and what of that?" asked the Governor keenly, with the air of one who is just on the edge of an idea.

"By the help of it this man shall be delivered into our hands."

"And how?"

"I will paint out the streak upon the *White Rose*, and make it in all things like the *Happy Delivery*. Then I will set sail for the Island of La Vache, where this man is slaying the wild oxen. When he sees me he will surely mistake me for his own vessel which he is awaiting, and he will come on board to his own undoing."

It was a simple plan, and yet it seemed to the Governor that it might be effective. Without hesitation he gave Craddock permission to carry it out, and to take any steps he liked in order to further the object which he had in view. Sir Edward was not very sanguine, for many attempts had been made upon Sharkey, and their results had shown that he was as cunning as he was ruthless. But this gaunt Puritan with the evil record was cunning and ruthless also.

The contest of wits between two such men as Sharkey and Craddock appealed to the Governor's acute sense of sport, and though he was inwardly convinced that the chances were against him, he backed his man with the same loyalty which he would have shown to his horse or his cock.

Haste was, above all things, necessary, for upon any day the careening might be finished, and the pirates out at sea once more. But there was not very much to do, and there were many willing

hands to do it, so the second day saw the *White Rose* beating out for the open sea. There were many seamen in the port who knew the lines and rig of the pirate barque, and not one of them could see the slightest difference in this counterfeit. Her white side line had been painted out, her masts and yards were smoked, to give them the dingy appearance of the weather-beaten rover, and a large diamond-shaped patch was let into her foretopsail.

Her crew were volunteers, many of them being men who had sailed with Stephen Craddock before —the mate, Joshua Hird, an old slaver, had been his accomplice in many voyages, and came now at the bidding of his chief.

The avenging barque sped across the Caribbean Sea, and, at the sight of that patched top-sail, the little craft which they met flew left and right like frightened trout in a pool. On the fourth evening Point Abacou bore five miles to the north and east of them.

On the fifth they were at anchor in the Bay of Tortoises at the Island of La Vache, where Sharkey and his four men had been hunting. It was a well-wooded place, with the palms and underwood growing down to the thin crescent of silver sand which skirted the shore. They had hoisted the black flag and the red pennant, but no answer came from the shore. Craddock strained his eyes, hoping every instant to see a boat shoot out to them with Sharkey seated in the sheets. But the night passed away, and a day and yet another night, without any sign of the men whom they were endeavouring to trap. It looked as if they were already gone.

On the second morning Craddock went ashore in search of some proof whether Sharkey and his men were still upon the island. What he found reassured him greatly. Close to the shore was a boucan of green wood, such as was used for preserving the meat, and a great store of barbecued strips of ox-flesh was hung upon lines all round it. The pirate ship had not taken off her provisions, and therefore the hunters were still upon the island.

Why had they not shown themselves? Was it that they had detected that this was not their own ship? Or was it that they were hunting in the interior of the island, and were not on the lookout for a ship yet? Craddock was still hesitating between the two alternatives, when a Carib Indian came down with information. The pirates were in the island, he said, and their camp was a day's march from the sea. They had stolen his wife, and the marks of their stripes were still pink upon his brown back. Their enemies were his friends, and he would lead them to where they lay.

Craddock could not have asked for anything better; so early next morning, with a small party armed to the teeth, he set off under the guidance of the Carib. All day they struggled through brushwood and clambered over rocks, pushing their way further and further into the desolate heart of the island. Here and there they found traces of the hunters, the bones of a slain ox, or the marks of feet in a morass, and once, toward evening, it seemed to some of them that they heard the distant rattle of guns.

That night they spent under the trees, and pushed on again with the earliest light. About

noon they came to the huts of bark, which, the Carib told them, were the camp of the hunters, but they were silent and deserted. No doubt their occupants were away at the hunt and would return in the evening, so Craddock and his men lay in ambush in the brushwood around them. But no one came, and another night was spent in the forest. Nothing more could be done, and it seemed to Craddock that after the two days' absence it was time that he returned to his ship once more.

The return journey was less difficult, as they had already blazed a path for themselves. Before evening they found themselves once more at the Bay of Palms, and saw their ship riding at anchor where they had left her. Their boat and oars had been hauled up among the bushes, so they launched it and pulled out to the barque.

"No luck, then!" cried Joshua Hird, the mate, looking down with a pale face from the poop.

"His camp was empty, but he may come down to us yet," said Craddock, with his hand on the ladder.

Somebody upon deck began to laugh. "I think," said the mate, "that these men had better stay in the boat."

"Why so?"

"If you will come aboard, sir, you will understand it." He spoke in a curious hesitating fashion.

The blood flushed to Craddock's gaunt face.

"How is this, Master Hird?" he cried, springing up the side. "What mean you by giving orders to my boat's crew?"

But as he passed over the bulwarks, with one foot upon the deck and one knee upon the rail, a tow-bearded man, whom he had never before ob-

served aboard his vessel, grabbed suddenly at his pistol. Craddock clutched at the fellow's wrist, but at the same instant his mate snatched the cutlass from his side.

"What roguery is this?" shouted Craddock, looking furiously around him. But the crew stood in little knots about the deck, laughing and whispering amongst themselves without showing any desire to go to his assistance. Even in that hurried glance Craddock noticed that they were dressed in the most singular manner, with long riding-coats, full-skirted velvet gowns and coloured ribands at their knees, more like men of fashion than seamen.

As he looked at their grotesque figures he struck his brow with his clenched fist to be sure that he was awake. The deck seemed to be much dirtier than when he had left it, and there were strange, sun-blackened faces turned upon him from every side. Not one of them did he know save only Joshua Hird. Had the ship been captured in his absence? Were these Sharkey's men who were around him? At the thought he broke furiously away and tried to climb over to his boat, but a dozen hands were on him in an instant, and he was pushed aft through the open door of his own cabin.

And it was all different to the cabin which he had left. The floor was different, the ceiling was different, the furniture was different. His had been plain and austere. This was sumptuous and yet dirty, hung with rare velvet curtains splashed with wine-stains, and panelled with costly woods which were pocked with pistol-marks.

On the table was a great chart of the Caribbean

Sea, and beside it, with compasses in his hand, sat a clean-shaven, pale-faced man with a fur cap and a claret-coloured coat of damask. Craddock turned white under his freckles as he looked upon the long, thin, high-nostrilled nose and the red-rimmed eyes which were turned upon him with the fixed, humourous gaze of the master player who has left his opponent without a move.

"Sharkey!" cried Craddock.

Sharkey's thin lips opened and he broke into his high, sniggering laugh.

"You fool!" he cried, and, leaning over, he stabbed Craddock's shoulder again and again with his compasses. "You poor, dull-witted fool, would you match yourself against me?"

It was not the pain of the wounds, but it was the contempt in Sharkey's voice which turned Craddock into a savage madman. He flew at the pirate, roaring with rage, striking, kicking, writhing, and foaming. It took six men to drag him down on to the floor amidst the splintered remains of the table —and not one of the six who did not bear the prisoner's mark upon him. But Sharkey still surveyed him with the same contemptuous eye. From outside there came the crash of breaking wood and the clamour of startled voices.

"What is that?" asked Sharkey.

"They have stove the boat with cold shot, and the men are in the water."

"Let them stay there," said the pirate. "Now, Craddock, you know where you are. You are aboard my ship the *Happy Delivery*, and you lie at my mercy. I knew you for a stout seaman, you rogue, before you took to this long-shore canting. Your hands then were no cleaner than my own.

Will you sign articles, as your mate has done, and join us, or shall I heave you over to follow your ship's company?"

"Where is my ship?" asked Craddock.

"Scuttled in the bay."

"And the hands?"

"In the bay, too."

"Then, I'm for the bay also."

"Hock him and heave him over," said Sharkey.

Many rough hands had dragged Craddock out upon deck, and Galloway, the quartermaster, had already drawn his hanger to cripple him, when Sharkey came hurrying from his cabin with an eager face.

"We can do better with the hound!" he cried. "Sink me if it is not a rare plan. Throw him into the sail-room with the irons on, and do you come here, quartermaster, that I may tell you what I have in my mind."

So Craddock, bruised and wounded in soul and body, was thrown into the dark sail-room, so fettered that he could not stir hand or foot, but his Northern blood was running strong in his veins, and his grim spirit aspired only to make such an ending as might go some way toward atoning for the evil of his life. All night he lay in the curve of the bilge listening to the rush of the water and the straining of the timbers which told him that the ship was at sea, and driving fast. In the early morning some one came crawling to him in the darkness over the heaps of sails.

"Here's rum and biscuits," said the voice of his late mate. "It's at the risk of my life, Master Craddock, that I bring them to you."

"It was you who trapped me and caught me as

in a snare!" cried Craddock. "How shall you answer for what you have done?"

"What I did I did with the point of a knife betwixt my blade-bones."

"God forgive you for a coward, Joshua Hird. How came you into their hands?"

"Why, Master Craddock, the pirate ship came back from its careening upon the very day that you left us. They laid us aboard, and, short-handed as we were, with the best of the men ashore with you, we could offer but a poor defence. Some were cut down, and they were the happiest. The others were killed afterward. As to me, I saved my life by signing on with them."

"And they scuttled my ship?"

"They scuttled her, and then Sharkey and his men, who had been watching us from the brushwood, came off to the ship. His mainyard had been cracked and fished last voyage, so he had suspicions of us, seeing that ours was whole. Then he thought of laying the same trap for you which you had set for him."

Craddock groaned.

"How came I not to see that fished mainyard?" he muttered. "But whither are we bound?"

"We are running north and west."

"North and west! Then we are heading back toward Jamaica."

"With an eight-knot wind."

"Have you heard what they mean to do with me?"

"I have not heard. If you would but sign the articles——"

"Enough, Joshua Hird! I have risked my soul too often."

"As you wish! I have done what I could. Farewell!"

All that night and the next day the *Happy Delivery* ran before the easterly trades, and Stephen Craddock lay in the dark of the sail-room working patiently at his wrist-irons. One he had slipped off at the cost of a row of broken and bleeding knuckles, but, do what he would, he could not free the other, and his ankles were securely fastened.

From hour to hour he heard the swish of the water, and knew that the barque must be driving with all sail set in front of the trade wind. In that case they must be nearly back again to Jamaica by now. What plan could Sharkey have in his head, and what use did he hope to make of him? Craddock set his teeth, and vowed that if he had once been a villain from choice he would, at least, never be one by compulsion.

On the second morning Craddock became aware that sail had been reduced in the vessel, and that she was tacking slowly, with a light breeze on her beam. The varying slope of the sail-room and the sounds from the deck told his practised senses exactly what she was doing. The short reaches showed him that she was manœuvring near shore, and making for some definite point. If so, she must have reached Jamaica. But what could she be doing there?

And then suddenly there was a burst of hearty cheering from the deck, and then the crash of a gun above his head, and then the answering booming of guns from far over the water. Craddock sat up and strained his ears. Was the ship in action? Only the one gun had been fired, and though many

had answered, there were none of the crashings which told of a shot coming home.

Then, if it was not an action, it must be a salute. But who would salute Sharkey, the pirate? It could only be another pirate ship which would do so. So Craddock lay back again with a groan, and continued to work at the manacle which still held his right wrist.

But suddenly there came the shuffling of steps outside, and he had hardly time to wrap the loose links round his free hand, when the door was unbolted and two pirates came in.

"Got your hammer, carpenter?" asked one, whom Craddock recognised as the big quartermaster. "Knock off his leg shackles, then. Better leave the bracelets—he's safer with them on."

With hammer and chisel the carpenter loosened the irons.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Craddock.

"Come on deck and you'll see."

The sailor seized him by the arm and dragged him roughly to the foot of the companion. Above him was a square of blue sky cut across by the mizzen gaff, with the colours flying at the peak. But it was the sight of those colours which struck the breath from Stephen Craddock's lips. For there were two of them, and the British ensign was flying above the Jolly Rodger—the honest flag above that of the rogue.

For an instant Craddock stopped in amazement, but a brutal push from the pirates behind drove him up the companion ladder. As he stepped out upon deck, his eyes turned up to the main, and there again were the British colours flying above

the red pennant, and all the shrouds and rigging were garlanded with streamers.

Had the ship been taken, then? But that was impossible, for there were the pirates clustering in swarms along the port bulwarks, and waving their hats joyously in the air. Most prominent of all was the renegade mate, standing on the foc'sle head, and gesticulating wildly. Craddock looked over the side to see what they were cheering at, and then in a flash he saw how critical was the moment.

On the port bow, and about a mile off, lay the white houses and forts of Port Royal, with flags breaking out everywhere over their roofs. Right ahead was the opening of the palisades leading to the town of Kingston. Not more than a quarter of a mile off was a small sloop working out against the very slight wind. The British ensign was at her peak, and her rigging was all decorated. On her deck could be seen a dense crowd of people cheering and waving their hats, and the gleam of scarlet told that there were officers of the garrison among them.

In an instant, with the quick perception of a man of action, Craddock saw through it all. Sharkey, with that diabolical cunning and audacity which were among his main characteristics, was simulating the part which Craddock would himself have played, had he come back victorious. It was in *his* honour that the salutes were firing and the flags flying. It was to welcome *him* that this ship with the Governor, the commandant, and the chiefs of the island was approaching. In another ten minutes they would all be under the guns of the *Happy Delivery*, and Sharkey would have won the greatest stake that ever a pirate played for yet.

"Bring him forward," cried the pirate captain, as Craddock appeared between the carpenter and the quartermaster. "Keep the ports closed, but clear away the port guns, and stand by for a broadside. Another two cable lengths and we have them."

"They are edging away," said the boatswain. "I think they smell us."

"That's soon set right," said Sharkey, turning his filmy eyes upon Craddock. "Stand there, you—right there, where they can recognise you, with your hand on the guy, and wave your hat to them. Quick, or your brains will be over your coat. Put an inch of your knife into him, Ned. Now, will you wave your hat? Try him again, then. Hey, shoot him! stop him!"

But it was too late. Relying upon the manacles, the quartermaster had taken his hands for a moment off Craddock's arm. In that instant he had flung off the carpenter and, amid a spatter of pistol bullets, had sprung the bulwarks and was swimming for his life. He had been hit and hit again, but it takes many pistols to kill a resolute and powerful man who has his mind set upon doing something before he dies. He was a strong swimmer, and, in spite of the red trail which he left in the water behind him, he was rapidly increasing his distance from the pirate.

"Give me a musket!" cried Sharkey, with a savage oath.

He was a famous shot, and his iron nerves never failed him in an emergency. The dark head appearing on the crest of a roller, and then swooping down on the other side, was already half-way to the sloop. Sharkey dwelt long upon his aim be-

fore he fired. With the crack of the gun the swimmer reared himself up in the water, waved his hands in a gesture of warning, and roared out in a voice which rang over the bay. Then, as the sloop swung round her head-sails, and the pirate fired an impotent broadside, Stephen Craddock, smiling grimly in his death agony, sank slowly down to that golden couch which glimmered far beneath him.

III

HOW COPLEY BANKS SLEW CAPTAIN SHARKEY

THE Buccaneers were something higher than a mere band of marauders. They were a floating republic, with laws, usages, and discipline of their own. In their endless and remorseless quarrel with the Spaniards they had some semblance of right upon their side. Their bloody harryings of the cities of the Main were not more barbarous than the inroads of Spain upon the Netherlands—or upon the Caribs in these same American lands.

The chief of the Buccaneers, were he English or French, a Morgan or a Granmont, was still a responsible person, whose country might countenance him, or even praise him, so long as he refrained from any deed which might shock the leathery seventeenth-century conscience too outrageously. Some of them were touched with religion, and it is still remembered how Sawkins threw the dice overboard upon the Sabbath, and Daniel pistolled a man before the altar for irreverence.

But there came a day when the fleets of the

Buccaneers no longer mustered at the Tortugas, and the solitary and outlawed pirate took their place. Yet even with him the tradition of restraint and of discipline still lingered; and among the early pirates, the Avorys, the Englands, and the Robertses, there remained some respect for human sentiment. They were more dangerous to the merchant than to the seaman.

But they in turn were replaced by more savage and desperate men, who frankly recognised that they would get no quarter in their war with the human race, and who swore that they would give as little as they got. Of their histories we know little that is trustworthy. They wrote no memoirs and left no trace, save an occasional blackened and bloodstained derelict adrift upon the face of the Atlantic. Their deeds could only be surmised from the long roll of ships who never made their port.

Searching the records of history, it is only here and there in an old-world trial that the veil that shrouds them seems for an instant to be lifted, and we catch a glimpse of some amazing and grotesque brutality behind. Such was the breed of Ned Low, of Gow the Scotchman, and of the infamous Sharkey, whose coal-black barque, the *Happy Delivery*, was known from the Newfoundland Banks to the mouths of the Orinoco as the dark forerunner of misery and of death.

There were many men, both among the islands and on the main, who had a blood feud with Sharkey, but not one who had suffered more bitterly than Copley Banks, of Kingston. Banks had been one of the leading sugar merchants of the West Indies. He was a man of position, a member of the Council, the husband of a Percival, and the

cousin of the Governor of Virginia. His two sons had been sent to London to be educated, and their mother had gone over to bring them back. On their return voyage the ship, the *Duchess of Cornwall*, fell into the hands of Sharkey, and the whole family met with an infamous death.

Copley Banks said little when he heard the news, but he sank into a morose and enduring melancholy. He neglected his business, avoided his friends, and spent much of his time in the low taverns of the fishermen and seamen. There, amidst riot and devilry, he sat silently puffing at his pipe, with a set face and a smouldering eye. It was generally supposed that his misfortunes had shaken his wits, and his old friends looked at him askance, for the company which he kept was enough to bar him from honest men.

From time to time there came rumours of Sharkey over the sea. Sometimes it was from some schooner which had seen a great flame upon the horizon, and approaching to offer help to the burning ship, had fled away at the sight of the sleek, black barque, lurking like a wolf near a mangled sheep. Sometimes it was a frightened trader, which had come tearing in with her canvas curved like a lady's bodice, because she had seen a patched foretopsail rising slowly above the violet waterline. Sometimes it was from a coaster, which had found a waterless Bahama cay littered with sun-dried bodies.

Once there came a man who had been mate of a Guineaman, and who had escaped from the pirate's hands. He could not speak—for reasons which Sharkey could best supply—but he could write, and he did write, to the very great interest of Copley

Banks. For hours they sat together over the map, and the dumb man pointed here and there to outlying reefs and tortuous inlets, while his companion sat smoking in silence, with his unvarying face and his fiery eyes.

One morning, some two years after his misfortune, Mr. Copley Banks strode into his own office with his old air of energy and alertness. The manager stared at him in surprise, for it was months since he had shown any interest in business.

"Good morning, Mr. Banks!" said he.

"Good morning, Freeman. I see that *Ruffling Harry* is in the Bay."

"Yes, sir; she clears for the Windward Islands on Wednesday."

"I have other plans for her, Freeman. I have determined upon a slaving venture to Whydah."

"But her cargo is ready, sir."

"Then it must come out again, Freeman. My mind is made up, and the *Ruffling Harry* must go slaving to Whydah."

All argument and persuasion were vain, so the manager had dolefully to clear the ship once more.

And then Copley Banks began to make preparations for his African voyage. It appeared that he relied upon force rather than barter for the filling of his hold, for he carried none of those showy trinkets which savages love, but the brig was fitted with eight nine-pounder guns and racks full of muskets and cutlasses. The after sail-room next the cabin was transformed into a powder magazine, and she carried as many round shot as a well-found privateer. Water and provisions were shipped for a long voyage.

But the preparation of his ship's company was most surprising. It made Freeman, the manager, realise that there was truth in the rumour that his master had taken leave of his senses. For, under one pretext or another, he began to dismiss the old and tried hands, who had served the firm for years, and in their place he embarked the scum of the port—men whose reputations were so vile that the lowest crimp would have been ashamed to furnish them.

There was Birthmark Sweetlocks, who was known to have been present at the killing of the logwood cutters, so that his hideous scarlet disfigurement was put down by the fanciful as being a red afterglow from that great crime. He was first mate, and under him was Israel Martin, a little sun-wilted fellow who had served with Howell Davies at the taking of Cape Coast Castle.

The crew were chosen from amongst those whom Banks had met and known in their own infamous haunts, and his own table-steward was a haggard-faced man, who gobbled at you when he tried to talk. His beard had been shaved, and it was impossible to recognise him as the same man whom Sharkey had placed under the knife, and who had escaped to tell his experiences to Copley Banks.

These doings were not unnoticed, nor yet uncommented upon in the town of Kingston. The Commandant of the troops—Major Harvey, of the Artillery—made serious representations to the Governor.

"She is not a trader, but a small warship," said he. "I think it would be as well to arrest Copley Banks and to seize the vessel."

"What do you suspect?" asked the Governor, who was a slow-witted man, broken down with fevers and port wine.

"I suspect," said the soldier, "that it is Stede Bonnet over again."

Now, Stede Bonnet was a planter of high reputation and religious character, who, from some sudden and overpowering freshet of wildness in his blood, had given up everything in order to start off pirating in the Caribbean Sea. The example was a recent one, and it had caused the utmost consternation in the islands. Governors had before now been accused of being in league with pirates, and of receiving commissions upon their plunder, so that any want of vigilance was open to a sinister construction.

"Well, Major Harvey," said he, "I am vastly sorry to do anything which may offend my friend Copley Banks, for many a time have my knees been under his mahogany, but in face of what you say there is no choice for me but to order you to board the vessel and to satisfy yourself as to her character and destination."

So at one in the morning Major Harvey, with a launchful of his soldiers, paid a surprise visit to the *Ruffling Harry*, with the result that they picked up nothing more solid than a hempen cable floating at the moorings. It had been slipped by the brig, whose owner had scented danger. She had already passed the Palisades, and was beating out against the northeast trades on a course for the Windward Passage.

When upon the next morning the brig had left Morant Point a mere haze upon the Southern horizon, the men were called aft, and Copley

Bangs revealed his plans to them. He had chosen them, he said, as brisk boys and lads of spirit, who would rather run some risk upon the sea than starve for a living upon the shore. King's ships were few and weak, and they could master any trader who might come their way. Others had done well at the business, and with a handy, well-found vessel, there was no reason why they should not turn their tarry jackets into velvet coats. If they were prepared to sail under the black flag, he was ready to command them; but if any wished to withdraw, they might have the gig and row back to Jamaica.

Four men out of six-and-forty asked for their discharge, went over the ship's side into the boat, and rowed away amidst the jeers and howlings of the crew. The rest assembled aft, and drew up the articles of their association. A square of black tarpaulin had the white skull painted upon it, and was hoisted amidst cheering at the main.

Officers were elected, and the limits of their authority fixed. Copley Banks was chosen Captain, but, as there are no mates upon a pirate craft, Birthmark Sweetlocks became quartermaster, and Israel Martin the boatswain. There was no difficulty in knowing what was the custom of the brotherhood, for half the men at least had served upon pirates before. Food should be the same for all, and no man should interfere with another man's drink! The Captain should have a cabin, but all hands should be welcome to enter it when they chose.

All should share and share alike, save only the captain, quartermaster, boatswain, carpenter, and master-gunner, who had from a quarter to a whole

share extra. He who saw a prize first should have the best weapon taken out of her. He who boarded her first should have the richest suit of clothes aboard of her. Every man might treat his own prisoner, be it man or woman, after his own fashion. If a man flinched from his gun, the quartermaster should pistol him. These were some of the rules which the crew of the *Ruffling Harry* subscribed by putting forty-two crosses at the foot of the paper upon which they had been drawn.

So a new rover was afloat upon the seas, and her name before a year was over became as well known as that of the *Happy Delivery*. From the Bahamas to the Leewards, and from the Leewards to the Windwards, Copley Banks became the rival of Sharkey and the terror of traders. For a long time the barque and the brig never met, which was the more singular, as the *Ruffling Harry* was forever looking in at Sharkey's resorts; but at last one day, when she was passing down the inlet of Coxon's Hole, at the east end of Cuba, with the intention of careening, there was the *Happy Delivery*, with her blocks and tackle-falls already rigged for the same purpose.

Copley Banks fired a shotted salute and hoisted the green trumpeter ensign, as the custom was among gentlemen of the sea. Then he dropped his boat and went aboard.

Captain Sharkey was not a man of a genial mood, nor had he any kindly sympathy for those who were of the same trade as himself. Copley Banks found him seated astride upon one of the after guns, with his New England quartermaster, Ned Galloway, and a crowd of roaring ruffians standing about him. Yet none of them roared

with quite such assurance when Sharkey's pale face and filmy blue eyes were turned upon him.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, with his cambric frills breaking through his open red satin long-flapped vest. The scorching sun seemed to have no power upon his fleshless frame, for he wore a low fur cap, as though it had been winter. A many-coloured band of silk passed across his body and supported a short murderous sword, while his broad, brass-buckled belt was stuffed with pistols.

"Sink you for a poacher!" he cried as Copley Banks passed over the bulwarks. "I will drub you within an inch of your life, and that inch also! What mean you by fishing in my waters?"

Copley Banks looked at him, and his eyes were like those of a traveller who sees his home at last.

"I am glad that we are of one mind," said he, "for I am myself of opinion that the seas are not large enough for the two of us. But if you will take your sword and pistols and come upon a sand-bank with me, then the world will be rid of a damned villain whichever way it goes."

"Now, this is talking!" cried Sharkey, jumping off the gun and holding out his hand. "I have not met many who could look John Sharkey in the eyes and speak with a full breath. May the devil seize me if I do not choose you as a consort! But if you play me false, then I will come aboard of you and gut you upon your own poop."

"And I pledge you the same!" said Copley Banks, and so the two pirates became sworn comrades to each other.

That summer they went north as far as the Newfoundland Banks, and harried the New York traders and the whale-ships from New England. It was

Copley Banks who captured the Liverpool ship, *House of Hanover*, but it was Sharkey who fastened her master to the windlass and pelted him to death with empty claret-bottles.

Together they engaged the King's ship, *Royal Fortune*, which had been sent in search of them, and beat her off after a night action of five hours, the drunken, raving crews fighting naked in the light of the battle-lanterns, with a bucket of rum and a pannikin laid by the tackles of every gun. They ran to Topsail Inlet in North Carolina to refit, and then in the spring they were at the Grand Caicos, ready for a long cruise down the West Indies.

By this time Sharkey and Copley Banks had become very excellent friends, for Sharkey loved a whole-hearted villain, and he loved a man of metal, and it seemed to him that the two met in the captain of the *Ruffling Harry*. It was long before he gave his confidence to him, for cold suspicion lay deep in his character. Never once would he trust himself outside his own ship and away from his own men.

But Copley Banks came often on board the *Happy Delivery*, and joined Sharkey in many of his morose debauches, so that at last any misgivings of the latter were set at rest. He knew nothing of the evil that he had done to his new boon companion, for of his many victims how could he remember the woman and the two boys whom he had slain with such levity so long ago! When, therefore, he received a challenge to himself and to his quartermaster for a carouse upon the last evening of their stay at the Caicos Bank, he saw no reason to refuse.

A well-found passenger ship had been rifled the week before, so their fare was of the best, and after supper five of them drank deeply together. There were the two captains, Birthmark Sweetlocks, Ned Galloway, and Israel Martin, the old buccaneersman. To wait upon them was the dumb steward, whose head Sharkey split with his glass, because he had been too slow in the filling of it.

The quartermaster had slipped Sharkey's pistols away from him, for it was an old joke with him to fire them cross-handed under the table, and see who was the luckiest man. It was a pleasantry which had cost his boatswain his leg, so now, when the table was cleared, they would coax Sharkey's weapons away from him on the excuse of the heat, and lay them out of his reach.

The Captain's cabin of the *Ruffling Harry* was in a deck-house upon the poop, and a stern-chaser gun was mounted at the back of it. Round shot were racked round the wall, and three great hogsheads of powder made a stand for dishes and for bottles. In this grim room the five pirates sang and roared and drank, while the silent steward still filled up their glasses, and passed the box and the candle round for their tobacco-pipes. Hour after hour the talk became fouler, the voices hoarser, the curses and shoutings more incoherent, until three of the five had closed their blood-shot eyes, and dropped their swimming heads upon the table.

Copley Banks and Sharkey were left face to face, the one because he had drunk the least, the other because no amount of liquor would ever shake his iron nerve or warm his sluggish blood. Behind him stood the watchful steward, for ever filling up his waning glass. From without came the low lapping

of the tide, and from over the water a sailor's chanty from the barque.

In the windless tropical night the words came clearly to their ears:

"A trader sailed from Stepney Town,
Wake her up! Shake her up! Try her with the mainsail!
A trader sailed from Stepney Town
With a keg full of gold and a velvet gown.
Ho, the bully Rover Jack,
Waiting with his yard aback
Out upon the Lowland Sea."

The two boon companions sat listening in silence. Then Copley Banks glanced at the steward, and the man took a coil of rope from the shot-rack behind him.

"Captain Sharkey," said Copley Banks, "do you remember the *Duchess of Cornwall*, hailing from London, which you took and sank three years ago off the Statira Shoal?"

"Curse me if I can bear their names in mind," said Sharkey. "We did as many as ten ships a week about that time."

"There were a mother and two sons among the passengers. Maybe that will bring it back to your mind."

Captain Sharkey leant back in thought, with his huge thin beak of a nose jutting upward. Then he burst suddenly into a high treble, neighing laugh. He remembered it, he said, and he added details to prove it.

"But burn me if it had not slipped from my mind!" he cried. "How came you to think of it?"

"It was of interest to me," said Copley Banks,

"for the woman was my wife and the lads were my only sons."

Sharkey stared across at his companion, and saw that the smouldering fire which lurked always in his eyes had burned up into a lurid flame. He read their menace, and he clapped his hands to his empty belt. Then he turned to seize a weapon, but the bight of a rope was cast round him, and in an instant his arms were bound to his side. He fought like a wildcat and screamed for help.

"Ned!" he yelled. "Ned! Wake up! Here's damned villainy! Help, Ned, help!"

But the three men were far too deeply sunk in their swinish sleep for any voice to wake them. Round and round went the rope, until Sharkey was swathed like a mummy from ankle to neck. They propped him stiff and helpless against a powder barrel, and they gagged him with a handkerchief, but his filmy, red-rimmed eyes still looked curses at them. The dumb man chattered in his exultation, and Sharkey winced for the first time when he saw the empty mouth before him. He understood that vengeance, slow and patient, had dogged him long, and clutched him at last.

The two captors had their plans all arranged, and they were somewhat elaborate.

First of all they stove the heads of two of the great powder barrels, and they heaped the contents out upon the table and floor. They piled it round and under the three drunken men, until each sprawled in a heap of it. Then they carried Sharkey to the gun and they triced him sitting over the porthole, with his body about a foot from the muzzle. Wriggle as he would he could not move an inch either to right or left, and the dumb

man trussed him up with a sailor's cunning, so that there was no chance that he should work free.

"Now, you bloody devil," said Copley Banks, softly, "you must listen to what I have to say to you, for they are the last words that you will hear. You are my man now, and I have bought you at a price, for I have given all that a man can give here below, and I have given my soul as well.

"To reach you I have had to sink to your level. For two years I strove against it, hoping that some other way might come, but I learnt that there was no other way. I've robbed and I have murdered —worse still, I have laughed and lived with you— and all for the one end. And now my time has come, and you will die as I would have you die, seeing the shadow creeping slowly upon you and the devil waiting for you in the shadow."

Sharkey could hear the hoarse voices of his rovers singing their chanty over the water:

"Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
Wake her up! Shake her up! Every stick a-bending!
Where is the trader of Stepney Town?
His gold's on the capstan, his blood's on his gown.
All for bully Rover Jack,
Reaching on the weather tack
Right across the Lowland Sea."

The words came clear to his ear, and just outside he could hear two men pacing backward and forward upon the deck. And yet he was helpless, staring down the mouth of the nine-pounder, unable to move an inch or to utter so much as a groan. Again there came the burst of voices from the deck of the barque:

"So it's up and it's over to Stornoway Bay,
Pack it on! Crack it on! Try her with the stun-sails!
It's off on a bowline to Stornoway Bay,
Where the liquor is good and the lasses are gay,
Waiting for their bully Jack,
Watching for him sailing back,
Right across the Lowland Sea."

To the dying pirate the jovial words and rollicking tune made his own fate seem the harsher, but there was no softening in his venomous blue eyes. Copley Banks had brushed away the priming of the gun, and had sprinkled fresh powder over the touch-hole. Then he had taken up the candle and cut it to the length of about an inch. This he placed upon the loose powder at the breach of the gun. Then he scattered powder thickly over the floor beneath, so that when the candle fell at the recoil it must explode the huge pile in which the three drunkards were wallowing.

"You've made others look death in the face, Sharkey," said he; "now it has come to be your own turn. You and these swine here shall go together!" He lit the candle-end as he spoke, and blew out the other lights upon the table. Then he passed out with the dumb man, and locked the cabin door upon the outer side. But before he closed it he took an exultant look backward, and received one last curse from those unconquerable eyes. In the single dim circle of light that ivory-white face, with the gleam of moisture upon the high, bald forehead, was the last that was ever seen of Sharkey.

There was a skiff along side, and in it Copley Banks and the dumb steward made their way to the beach, and looked back upon the brig riding in

the moonlight just outside the shadow of the palm trees. They waited and waited, watching that dim light which shone through the stern port. And then at last there came the dull thud of a gun, and an instant later the shattering crash of the explosion. The long, sleek, black barque, the sweep of white sand, and the fringe of nodding, feathery palm trees sprang into dazzling light and back into darkness again. Voices screamed and called upon the bay.

Then Copley Banks, his heart singing within him, touched his companion upon the shoulder, and they plunged together into the lonely jungle of the Caicos.

THE CROXLEY MASTER

I

MR. ROBERT MONTGOMERY was seated at his desk, his head upon his hands, in a state of the blackest despondency. Before him was the open ledger with the long columns of Dr. Oldacre's prescriptions. At his elbow lay the wooden tray with the labels in various partitions, the cork box, the lumps of twisted sealing-wax, while in front a rank of empty bottles waited to be filled. But his spirits were too low for work. He sat in silence, with his fine shoulders bowed and his head upon his hands.

Outside, through the grimy surgery window over a foreground of blackened brick and slate, a line of enormous chimneys like Cyclopean pillars upheld the lowering, dun-coloured cloudbank. For six days in the week they spouted smoke, but to-day the furnace fires were banked, for it was Sunday. Sordid and polluting gloom hung over a district blighted and blasted by the greed of man. There was nothing in the surroundings to cheer a despondent soul, but it was more than his dismal environment which weighed upon the medical assistant.

His trouble was deeper and more personal. The winter session was approaching. He should be back again at the University completing the last year which would give him his medical degree; but alas! he had not the money with which to pay his

"Look y'ere!" said a voice at the door.

Montgomery looked up, for the voice was a loud and rasping one. A young man stood at the entrance—a stocky, bull-necked young miner, in tweed Sunday clothes and an aggressive necktie. He was a sinister-looking figure, with dark, insolent eyes, and the jaw and throat of a bulldog.

"Look y'ere!" said he again. "Why hast thou not sent t' medicine oop as thy master ordered?"

Montgomery had become accustomed to the brutal frankness of the Northern worker. At first it had enraged him, but after a time he had grown callous to it, and accepted it as it was meant. But this was something different. It was insolence—brutal, overbearing insolence, with physical menace behind it.

"What name?" he asked coldly.

"Barton. Happen I may give thee cause to mind that name, yoong man. Mak' oop t' wife's medicine this very moment, look ye, or it will be the worse for thee."

Montgomery smiled. A pleasant sense of relief thrilled softly through him. What blessed safety-valve was this through which his jangled nerves might find some outlet? The provocation was so gross, the insult so unprovoked, that he could have none of those qualms which take the edge off a man's mettle. He finished sealing the bottle upon which he was occupied, and he addressed it and placed it carefully in the rack.

"Look here!" said he turning round to the miner, "your medicine will be made up in its turn and sent down to you. I don't allow folk in the surgery. Wait outside in the waiting-room, if you wish to wait at all."

upon your money, you would advance this sum to me. I will pay you back, sir, I really will. Or, if you like, I will work it off after I am qualified."

The doctor's lips had thinned into a narrow line. His eyes were raised again, and sparkled indignantly.

"Your request is unreasonable, Mr. Montgomery. I am surprised that you should have made it. Consider, sir, how many thousands of medical students there are in this country. No doubt there are many of them who have a difficulty in finding their fees. Am I to provide for them all? Or why should I make an exception in your favour? I am grieved and disappointed, Mr. Montgomery, that you should have put me into the painful position of having to refuse you." He turned upon his heel, and walked with offended dignity out of the surgery.

The student smiled bitterly, and turned to his work of making up the morning prescriptions. It was poor and unworthy work—work which any weakling might have done as well, and this was a man of exceptional nerve and sinew. But, such as it was, it brought him his board and £1 a week, enough to help him during the summer months and let him save a few pounds toward his winter keep. But those class fees! Where were they to come from? He could not save them out of his scanty wage. Dr. Oldacre would not advance them. He saw no way of earning them. His brains were fairly good, but brains of that quality were a drug in the market. He only excelled in his strength; and where was he to find a customer for that? But the ways of Fate are strange, and his customer was at hand.

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"Yoong man," said the miner, "thou's got to mak' t' wife's medicine here, and now, and quick, while I wait and watch thee, or else happen thou might need some medicine thysel' before all is over."

"I shouldn't advise you to fasten a quarrel upon me." Montgomery was speaking in the hard, staccato voice of a man who is holding himself in with difficulty. "You'll save trouble if you'll go quietly. If you don't you'll be hurt. Ah, you would? Take it, then!"

The blows were almost simultaneous—a savage swing which whistled past Montgomery's ear, and a straight drive which took the workman on the chin. Luck was with the assistant. That single whizzing uppercut, and the way in which it was delivered, warned him that he had a formidable man to deal with. But if he had underrated his antagonist, his antagonist had also underrated him, and had laid himself open to a fatal blow.

The miner's head had come with a crash against the corner of the surgery shelves, and he had dropped heavily onto the ground. There he lay with his bandy legs drawn up and his hands thrown abroad, the blood trickling over the surgery tiles.

"Had enough?" asked the assistant, breathing fiercely through his nose.

But no answer came. The man was insensible. And then the danger of his position came upon Montgomery, and he turned as white as his antagonist. A Sunday, the immaculate Dr. Oldacre with his pious connection, a savage brawl with a patient; he would irretrievably lose his situation if the facts came out. It was not much of a situation, but he could not get another without a refer-

ence, and Oldacre might refuse him one. Without money for his classes, and without a situation—what was to become of him? It was absolute ruin.

But perhaps he could escape exposure after all. He seized his insensible adversary, dragged him out into the centre of the room, loosened his collar, and squeezed the surgery sponge over his face. He sat up at last with a gasp and a scowl.

"Domn thee, thou's spoilt my necktie," said he, mopping up the water from his breast.

"I'm sorry I hit you so hard," said Montgomery, apologetically.

"Thou hit me hard! I could stan' such fly-flappin' all day. 'Twas this here press that cracked my pate for me, and thou art a looky man to be able to boast as thou hast outed me. And now I'd be obliged to thee if thou wilt give me t' wife's medicine."

Montgomery gladly made it up and handed it to the miner.

"You are weak still," said he. "Won't you stay awhile and rest?"

"T' wife wants her medicine," said the man, and lurched out at the door.

The assistant, looking after him, saw him rolling with an uncertain step down the street, until a friend met him, and they walked on arm-in-arm. The man seemed in his rough Northern fashion to bear no grudge, and so Montgomery's fears left him. There was no reason why the doctor should know anything about it. He wiped the blood from the floor, put the surgery in order, and went on with his interrupted task, hoping that he had come scathless out of a very dangerous business.

Yet all day he was aware of a sense of vague

uneasiness, which sharpened into dismay when, late in the afternoon, he was informed that three gentlemen had called and were waiting for him in the surgery. A coroner's inquest, a descent of detectives, an invasion of angry relatives—all sorts of possibilities rose to scare him. With tense nerves and a rigid face he went to meet his visitors.

They were a very singular trio. Each was known to him by sight; but what on earth the three could be doing together, and, above all, what they could expect from *him*, was a most inexplicable problem.

The first was Sorley Wilson, the son of the owner of the Nonpareil Coal-pit. He was a young blood of twenty, heir to a fortune, a keen sportsman, and down for the Easter Vacation from Magdalene College. He sat now upon the edge of the surgery table, looking in thoughtful silence at Montgomery, and twisting the ends of his small, black, waxed moustache.

The second was Purvis, the publican, owner of the chief beershop, and well known as the local bookmaker. He was a coarse, clean-shaven man, whose fiery face made a singular contrast with his ivory-white bald head. He had shrewd, light-blue eyes with foxy lashes, and he also leaned forward in silence from his chair, a fat, red hand upon either knee, and stared critically at the young assistant.

So did the third visitor, Fawcett, the horse-breaker, who leaned back, his long, thin legs, with their box-cloth riding-gaiters, thrust out in front of him, tapping his protruding teeth with his riding-whip, with anxious thought in every line of his rugged, bony face. Publican, exquisite, and horse-breaker were all three equally silent, equally ear-

nest, and equally critical. Montgomery, seated in the midst of them, looked from one to the other.

"Well, gentlemen?" he observed, but no answer came.

The position was embarrassing.

"No," said the horsebreaker, at last. "No. It's off. It's nowt."

"Stand oop, lad; let's see thee standin'." It was the publican who spoke.

Montgomery obeyed. He would learn all about it, no doubt, if he were patient. He stood up and turned slowly round, as if in front of his tailor.

"It's off! It's off!" cried the horsebreaker. "Why, mon, the Master would break him over his knee."

"Oh, that be hanged for a yarn!" said the young Cantab. "You can drop out if you like, Fawcett, but I'll see this thing through, if I have to do it alone. I don't hedge a penny. I like the cut of him a great deal better than I liked Ted Barton."

"Look at Barton's shoulders, Mr. Wilson."

"Lumpiness isn't always strength. Give me nerve and fire and breed. That's what wins."

"Ay, sir, you have it theer—you have it theer!" said the fat, red-faced publican, in a thick, suety voice. "It's the same wi' poops. Get 'em clean-bred an' fine, and they'll yark the thick 'uns—yark 'em out o' their skins."

"He's ten good pund on the light side," growled the horsebreaker.

"He's a welter weight, anyhow."

"A hundred and thirty."

"A hundred and fifty, if he's an ounce.

"Well, the Master doesn't scale much more than that."

"A hundred and seventy-five."

"That was when he was hog-fat and living high. Work the grease out of him, and I lay there's no great difference between them. Have you been weighed lately, Mr. Montgomery?"

It was the first direct question which had been asked him. He had stood in the midst of them, like a horse at a fair, and he was just beginning to wonder whether he was more angry or amused.

"I am just eleven stone," said he.

"I said that he was a welter weight."

"But suppose you was trained?" said the publican. "Wot then?"

"I am always in training."

"In a manner of speakin', no doubt, he *is* always in trainin'," remarked the horsebreaker. "But trainin' for everyday work ain't the same as trainin' with a trainer; and I dare bet, with all respec' to your opinion, Mr. Wilson, that there's half a stone of tallow on him at this minute."

The young Cantab put his fingers on the assistant's upper arm. Then with his other hand on his wrist he bent the forearm sharply, and felt the biceps, as round and hard as a cricket-ball, spring up under his fingers.

"Feel that!" said he.

The publican and horsebreaker felt it with an air of reverence.

"Good lad! He'll do yet!" cried Purvis.

"Gentlemen," said Montgomery, "I think that you will acknowledge that I have been very patient with you. I have listened to all that you have to say about my personal appearance, and now I must really beg that you will have the goodness to tell me what is the matter."

They all sat down in their serious, business-like way.

"That's easy done, Mr. Montgomery," said the fat-voiced publican. "But before sayin' anything, we had to wait and see whether, in a way of speakin', there was any need for us to say anything at all. Mr. Wilson thinks there is. Mr. Fawcett, who has the same right to his opinion, bein' also a backer and one o' the committee, thinks the other way."

"I thought him too light built, and I think so now," said the horsebreaker, still tapping his prominent teeth with the metal head of his riding-whip. "But happen he may pull through; and he's a fine-made, buirdly young chap, so if you mean to back him, Mr. Wilson——"

"Which I do."

"And you, Purvis?"

"I ain't one to go back, Fawcett."

"Well, I'll stan' to my share of the purse."

"And well I knew you would," said Purvis, "for it would be somethin' new to find Isaac Fawcett as a spoil-sport. Well, then, we make up the hundred for the stake among us, and the fight stands—always supposin' the young man is willin'."

"Excuse all this rot, Mr. Montgomery," said the University man, in a genial voice. "We've begun at the wrong end, I know, but we'll soon straighten it out, and I hope that you will see your way to falling in with our views. In the first place, you remember the man whom you knocked out this morning? He is Barton—the famous Ted Barton."

"I'm sure, sir, you may well be proud to have outed him in one round," said the publican. "Why, it took Morris, the ten-stone-six champion, a deal

more trouble than that before he put Barton to sleep. You've done a fine performance, sir, and happen you'll do a finer, if you give yourself the chance."

"I never heard of Ted Barton, beyond seeing the name on a medicine label," said the assistant.

"Well, you may take it from me that he's a slaughterer," said the horsebreaker. "You've taught him a lesson that he needed, for it was always a word and a blow with him, and the word alone was worth five shillin' in a public court. He won't be so ready now to shake his nief in the face of everyone he meets. However, that's neither here nor there."

Montgomery looked at them in bewilderment.

"For goodness sake, gentlemen, tell me what it is you want me to do!" he cried.

"We want you to fight Silas Craggs, better known as the Master of Croxley."

"But why?"

"Because Ted Barton was to have fought him next Saturday. He was the champion of the Wilson coal-pits, and the other was the Master of the iron-folk down at the Croxley smelters. We'd matched our man for a purse of a hundred against the Master. But you've queered our man, and he can't face such a battle with a two-inch cut at the back of his head. There's only one thing to be done, sir, and that is for you to take his place. If you can lick Ted Barton you may lick the Master of Croxley; but if you don't we're done, for there's no one else who is in the same street with him in this district. It's twenty rounds, two-ounce gloves, Queensberry rules, and a decision on points if you fight to the finish."

For a moment the absurdity of the thing drove every other thought out of Montgomery's head. But then there came a sudden revulsion. A hundred pounds!—all he wanted to complete his education was lying there ready to his hand, if only that hand were strong enough to pick it up. He had thought bitterly that morning that there was no market for his strength, but here was one where his muscle might earn more in an hour than his brains in a year. But a chill of doubt came over him.

"How can I fight for the coal-pits?" said he. "I am not connected with them."

"Eh, lad, but thou art!" cried old Purvis. "We've got it down in writin', and it's clear enough. 'Any one connected with the coal-pits.' Dr. Oldacre is the coal-pit club doctor; thou art his assistant. What more can they want?"

"Yes, that's right enough," said the Cantab. "It would be a very sporting thing of you, Mr. Montgomery, if you would come to our help when we are in such a hole. Of course, you might not like to take the hundred pounds; but I have no doubt that, in the case of your winning, we could arrange that it should take the form of a watch or piece of plate, or any other shape which might suggest itself to you. You see, you are responsible for our having lost our champion, so we really feel that we have a claim upon you."

"Give me a moment, gentlemen. It is very unexpected. I am afraid the doctor would never consent to my going—in fact, I am sure that he would not."

"But he need never know—not before the fight, at any rate. We are not bound to give the name

of our man. So long as he is within the weight limits on the day of the fight, that is all that concerns any one."

The adventure and the profit would either of them have attracted Montgomery. The two combined were irresistible.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I'll do it!"

The three sprang from their seats. The publican had seized his right hand, the horsedealer his left, and the Cantab slapped him on the back.

"Good lad! good lad!" croaked the publican. "Eh, mon, but if thou yark him, thou'll rise in one day from being just a common doctor to the best-known mon 'twixt here and Bradford. Thou art a witherin' tyke, thou art, and no mistake; and if thou beat the Master of Croxley, thou'll find all the beer thou want for the rest of thy life waiting for thee at the Four Sacks."

"It is the most sporting thing I ever heard of in my life," said young Wilson. "By George, sir, if you pull it off, you've got the constituency in your pocket, if you care to stand. You know the outhouse in my garden?"

"Next the road?"

"Exactly. I turned it into a gymnasium for Ted Barton. You'll find all you want there: clubs, punching ball, bars, dumb-bells, everything. Then you'll want a sparring partner. Ogilvy has been acting for Barton, but we don't think that he is class enough. Barton bears you no grudge. He's a good-hearted fellow, though cross-grained with strangers. He looked upon you as a stranger this morning, but he says he knows you now. He is quite ready to spar with you for practice, and he will come at any hour you will name."

"Thank you; I will let you know the hour," said Montgomery; and so the committee departed jubilant upon their way.

The medical assistant sat for a little time in the surgery turning it over in his mind. He had been trained originally at the University by the man who had been middle-weight champion in his day. It was true that his teacher was long past his prime, slow upon his feet and stiff in his joints, but even so he was still a tough antagonist; but Montgomery had found at last that he could more than hold his own with him. He had won the University medal, and his teacher, who had trained so many students, was emphatic in his opinion that he had never had one who was in the same class with him. He had been exhorted to go in for the Amateur Championships, but he had no particular ambition in that direction. Once he had put on the gloves with Hammer Tunstall in a booth at a fair, and had fought three rattling rounds, in which he had the worst of it, but had made the prize-fighter stretch himself to the uttermost. There was his whole record, and was it enough to encourage him to stand up to the Master of Croxley? He had never heard of the Master before, but then he had lost touch of the ring during the last few years of hard work. After all, what did it matter? If he won, there was the money, which meant so much to him. If he lost, it would only mean a thrashing. He could take punishment without flinching, of that he was certain. If there were only one chance in a hundred of pulling it off, then it was worth his while to attempt it.

Dr. Oldacre, new come from church, with an ostentatious Prayer-book in his kid-gloved hand, broke in upon his meditation.

"You don't go to service, I observe, Mr. Montgomery," said he, coldly.

"No, sir; I have had some business to detain me."

"It is very near to my heart that my household should set a good example. There are so few educated people in this district that a great responsibility devolves upon us. If we do not live up to the highest, how can we expect these poor workers to do so? It is a dreadful thing to reflect that the parish takes a great deal more interest in an approaching glove-fight than in their religious duties."

"A glove-fight, sir?" said Montgomery, guiltily.

"I believe that to be the correct term. One of my patients tells me that it is the talk of the district. A local ruffian, a patient of ours, by the way, is matched against a pugilist over at Croxley. I cannot understand why the law does not step in and stop so degrading an exhibition. It is really a prize-fight."

"A glove-fight, you said."

"I am informed that a two-ounce glove is an evasion by which they dodge the law, and make it difficult for the police to interfere. They contend for a sum of money. It seems dreadful and almost incredible—does it not?—to think that such scenes can be enacted within a few miles of our peaceful home. But you will realise, Mr. Montgomery, that while there are such influences for us to counteract, it is very necessary that we should live up to our highest."

The doctor's sermon would have had more effect if the assistant had not once or twice had occasion to test his highest and come upon it at

unexpectedly humble elevations. It is always so particularly easy to "compound for sins we're most inclined to by damning those we have no mind to." In any case, Montgomery felt that of all the men concerned in such a fight—promoters, backers, spectators—it is the actual fighter who holds the strongest and most honourable position. His conscience gave him no concern upon the subject. Endurance and courage are virtues, not vices, and brutality is, at least, better than effeminacy.

There was a little tobacco-shop at the corner of the street, where Montgomery got his bird's-eye and also his local information, for the shopman was a garrulous soul, who knew everything about the affairs of the district. The assistant strolled down there after tea and asked, in a casual way, whether the tobacconist had ever heard of the Master of Croxley.

"Heard of him! Heard of him!" the little man could hardly articulate in his astonishment. "Why, sir, he's the first mon o' the district, an' his name's as well known in the West Riding as the winner o' t' Derby. But Lor', sir"—here he stopped and rummaged among a heap of papers. "They are makin' a fuss about him on account o' his fight wi' Ted Barton, and so the *Croxley Herald* has his life an' record, an' here it is, an' thou canst read it for thysel'."

The sheet of the paper which he held up was a lake of print around an islet of illustration. The latter was a coarse wood-cut of a pugilist's head and neck set in a cross-barred jersey. It was a sinister but powerful face, the face of a debauched hero, clean-shaven, strongly eye-browed, keen-eyed, with a huge aggressive jaw and an animal dewlap beneath

it. The long, obstinate cheeks ran flush up to the narrow, sinister eyes. The mighty neck came down square from the ears and curved outward into shoulders, which had lost nothing at the hands of the local artist. Above was written "Silas Craggs," and beneath, "The Master of Croxley."

"Thou'll find all about him there, sir," said the tobacconist. "He's a witherin' tyke, he is, and we're proud to have him in the county. If he hadn't broke his leg he'd have been champion of England."

"Broke his leg, has he?"

"Yes, and it set badly. They ca' him owd K behind his bock, for thot is how his two legs look. But his arms—well, if they was both stropped to a bench, as the sayin' is, I wonder where the champion of England would be then."

"I'll take this with me," said Montgomery; and putting the paper into his pocket he returned home.

It was not a cheering record which he read there. The whole history of the Croxley Master was given in full, his many victories, his few defeats.

"Born in 1857," said the provincial biographer, "Silas Craggs, better known in sporting circles as The Master of Croxley, is now in his fortieth year."

"Hang it, I'm only twenty-three," said Montgomery to himself, and read on more cheerfully.

"Having in his youth shown a surprising aptitude for the game, he fought his way up among his comrades, until he became the recognised champion of the district and won the proud title which he still holds. Ambitious of a more than local fame, he secured a patron, and fought his first fight against Jack Barton, of Birmingham, in May, 1880,

at the old Loiterers' Club. Craggs, who fought at ten-stone-two at the time, had the better of fifteen rattling rounds, and gained an award on points against the Midlander. Having disposed of James Dunn, of Rotherhithe, Cameron, of Glasgow, and a youth named Fernie, he was thought so highly of by the fancy that he was matched against Ernest Willox, at that time middle-weight champion of the North of England, and defeated him in a hard-fought battle, knocking him out in the tenth round after a punishing contest. At this period it looked as if the very highest honours of the ring were within the reach of the young Yorkshireman, but he was laid upon the shelf by a most unfortunate accident. The kick of a horse broke his thigh, and for a year he was compelled to rest himself. When he returned to his work the fracture had set badly, and his activity was much impaired. It was owing to this that he was defeated in seven rounds by Willox, the man whom he had previously beaten, and afterward by James Shaw, of London, though the latter acknowledged that he had found the toughest customer of his career. Undismayed by his reverses, the Master adapted the style of his fighting to his physical disabilities and resumed his career of victory—defeating Norton (the black), Bobby Wilson, and Levy Cohen, the latter a heavy-weight. Conceding two stone, he fought a draw with the famous Billy McQuire, and afterward, for a purse of fifty pounds, he defeated Sam Hare at the Pelican Club, London. In 1891 a decision was given against him upon a foul when fighting a winning fight against Jim Taylor, the Australian middle-weight, and so mortified was he by the decision, that he withdrew from the ring.

Since then he has hardly fought at all save to accommodate any local aspirant who may wish to learn the difference between a bar-room scramble and a scientific contest. The latest of these ambitious souls comes from the Wilson coal-pits, which have undertaken to put up a stake of £100 and back their local champion. There are various rumours afloat as to who their representative is to be, the name of Ted Barton being freely mentioned; but the betting, which is seven to one on the Master against any untried man, is a fair reflection of the feeling of the community."

Montgomery read it over twice, and it left him with a very serious face. No light matter this which he had undertaken; no battle with a rough-and-tumble fighter who presumed upon a local reputation. The man's record showed that he was first-class—or nearly so. There were a few points in his favour, and he must make the most of them. There was age—twenty-three against forty. There was an old ring proverb that "Youth will be served," but the annals of the ring offer a great number of exceptions. A hard veteran, full of cool valour and ring-craft, could give ten or fifteen years and a beating to most striplings. He could not rely too much upon his advantage in age. But then there was the lameness; that must surely count for a great deal. And, lastly, there was the chance that the Master might underrate his opponent, that he might be remiss in his training, and refuse to abandon his usual way of life, if he thought that he had an easy task before him. In a man of his age and habits this seemed very possible. Montgomery prayed that it might be so. Meanwhile, if his opponent were the best man who ever

jumped the ropes into a ring, his own duty was clear. He must prepare himself carefully, throw away no chance, and do the very best that he could. But he knew enough to appreciate the difference which exists in boxing, as in every sport, between the amateur and the professional. The coolness, the power of hitting, above all the capability of taking punishment, count for so much. Those specially developed, gutta-percha-like abdominal muscles of the hardened pugilist will take without flinching a blow which would leave another man writhing on the ground. Such things are not to be acquired in a week, but all that could be done in a week should be done.

The medical assistant had a good basis to start from. He was 5 feet 11 inches—tall enough for anything on two legs, as the old ring men used to say—lithe and spare, with the activity of a panther, and a strength which had hardly yet ever found its limitations. His muscular development was finely hard, but his power came rather from that higher nerve-energy which counts for nothing upon a measuring tape. He had the well-curved nose and the widely-opened eye which never yet were seen upon the face of a craven, and behind everything he had the driving force, which came from the knowledge that his whole career was at stake upon the contest. The three backers rubbed their hands when they saw him at work punching the ball in the gymnasium next morning; and Fawcett, the horsebreaker, who had written to Leeds to hedge his bets, sent a wire to cancel the letter, and to lay another fifty at the market price of seven to one.

Montgomery's chief difficulty was to find time for his training without any interference from the

doctor. His work took him a large part of the day, but as the visiting was done on foot, and considerable distances had to be traversed, it was a training in itself. For the rest, he punched the swinging ball and worked with the dumb-bells for an hour every morning and evening, and boxed twice a day with Ted Barton in the gymnasium, gaining as much profit as could be got from a rushing, two-handed slogger. Barton was full of admiration for his cleverness and quickness, but doubtful about his strength. Hard hitting was the feature of his own style, and he exacted it from others.

"Lord, sir, that's a turble poor poonch for an eleven-stone man!" he would cry. "Thou wilt have to hit harder than that afore t' Master will know that thou art theer. Ah, thot's better, mon, thot's fine!" he would add, as his opponent lifted him across the room on the end of a right counter. "Thot's how I likes to feel 'em. Happen thou'lt pull through yet." He chuckled with joy when Montgomery knocked him into a corner. "Eh, mon, thou art comin' along grand. Thou hast fair yarked me off my legs. Do it again, lad, do it again!"

The only part of Montgomery's training which came within the doctor's observation was his diet, and that puzzled him considerably.

"You will excuse my remarking, Mr. Montgomery, that you are becoming rather particular in your tastes. Such fads are not to be encouraged in one's youth. Why do you eat toast with every meal?"

"I find that it suits me better than bread, sir."

"It entails unnecessary work upon the cook. I observe, also, that you have turned against potatoes."

"Yes, sir; I think that I am better without them."

"And you no longer drink your beer?"

"No, sir."

"These causeless whims and fancies are very much to be deprecated, Mr. Montgomery. Consider how many there are to whom these very potatoes and this very beer would be most acceptable."

"No doubt, sir. But at present I prefer to do without them."

They were sitting alone at lunch, and the assistant thought that it would be a good opportunity of asking leave for the day of the fight.

"I should be glad if you could let me have leave for Saturday, Dr. Oldacre."

"It is very inconvenient upon so busy a day."

"I should do a double day's work on Friday so as to leave everything in order. I should hope to be back in the evening."

"I am afraid I cannot spare you, Mr. Montgomery."

This was a facer. If he could not get leave he would go without it.

"You will remember, Dr. Oldacre, that when I came to you it was understood that I should have a clear day every month. I have never claimed one. But now there are reasons why I wish to have a holiday upon Saturday."

Dr. Oldacre gave in with a very bad grace.

"Of course, if you insist upon your formal rights, there is no more to be said, Mr. Montgomery, though I feel that it shows a certain indifference to my comfort and the welfare of the practice. Do you still insist?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Have your way."

The doctor was boiling over with anger, but Montgomery was a valuable assistant — steady, capable, and hard-working—and he could not afford to lose him. Even if he had been prompted to advance those class fees, for which his assistant had appealed, it would have been against his interests to do so, for he did not wish him to qualify, and he desired him to remain in his subordinate position, in which he worked so hard for so small a wage. There was something in the cool insistence of the young man, a quiet resolution in his voice as he claimed his Saturday, which aroused his curiosity.

"I have no desire to interfere unduly with your affairs, Mr. Montgomery, but were you thinking of having a day in Leeds upon Saturday?"

"No, sir."

"In the country?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are very wise. You will find a quiet day among the wild flowers a very valuable restorative. Had you thought of any particular direction?"

"I am going over Croxley way."

"Well, there is no prettier country when once you are past the iron-works. What could be more delightful than to lie upon the Fells, basking in the sunshine, with perhaps some instructive and elevating book as your companion? I should recommend a visit to the ruins of St. Bridget's Church, a very interesting relic of the early Norman era. By the way, there is one objection which I see to your going to Croxley on Saturday. It is upon that date, as I am informed, that that ruffianly glove-fight

takes place. You may find yourself molested by the blackguards whom it will attract."

"I will take my chance of that, sir," said the assistant.

On the Friday night, which was the last before the fight, Montgomery's three backers assembled in the gymnasium and inspected their man as he went through some light exercises to keep his muscles supple. He was certainly in splendid condition, his skin shining with health, and his eyes with energy and confidence. The three walked round him and exulted.

"He's simply ripping!" said the undergraduate. "By Gad, you've come out of it splendidly. You're as hard as a pebble, and fit to fight for your life."

"Happen he's a trifle on the fine side," said the publican. "Runs a bit light at the loins, to my way of thinkin'."

"What weight to-day?"

"Ten stone eleven," the assistant answered.

"That's only three pund off in a week's trainin'," said the horsebreaker. "He said right when he said that he was in condition. Well, it's fine stuff all there is of it, but I'm none so sure as there is enough." He kept poking his finger into Montgomery, as if he were one of his horses. "I hear that the Master will scale a hundred and sixty odd at the ring-side."

"But there's some of that which he'd like well to pull off and leave behind wi' his shirt," said Purvis. "I hear they've had a rare job to get him to drop his beer, and if it had not been for that great red-headed wench of his they'd never ha' done it. She fair scratted the face off a potman that had brought him a gallon from t' Chequers. They say

the hussy is his sparrin' partner, as well as his sweetheart, and that his poor wife is just breakin' her heart over it. Hullo, young 'un, what do you want?"

The door of the gymnasium had opened, and a lad about sixteen, grimy and black with soot and iron, stepped into the yellow glare of the oil-lamp. Ted Barton seized him by the collar.

"See here, thou yoong whelp, this is private, and we want noan o' thy spyin'!"

"But I maun speak to Mr. Wilson."

The young Cantab stepped forward.

"Well, my lad, what is it?"

"It's aboot t' fight, Mr. Wilson, sir. I wanted to tell your mon somethin' aboot t' Maister."

"We've no time to listen to gossip, my boy. We know all about the Master."

"But thou doan't, sir. Nobody knows but me and mother, and we thought as we'd like thy mon to know, sir, for we want him to fair bray him."

"Oh, you want the Master fair brayed, do you? So do we. Well, what have you to say?"

"Is this your mon, sir?"

"Well, suppose it is?"

"Then it's him I want to tell aboot it. T' Maister is blind o' the left eye."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir. Not stone blind, but rarely fogged. He keeps it secret, but mother knows, and so do I. If thou slip him on the left side he can't cop thee. Thou'll find it right as I tell thee. And mark him when he sinks his right. 'Tis his best blow, his right upper-cut. T' Maister's finisher, they ca' it at t' works. It's a turble blow, when it do come home."

"Thank you, my boy. This is information worth having about his sight," said Wilson. "How came you to know so much? Who are you?"

"I'm his son, sir."

Wilson whistled.

"And who sent you to us?"

"My mother. I maun get back to her again."

"Take this half-crown."

"No, sir, I don't seek money in comin' here. I do it——"

"For love?" suggested the publican.

"For hate!" said the boy, and darted off into the darkness.

"Seems to me t' red-headed wench may do him more harm than good, after all," remarked the publican. "And now, Mr. Montgomery, sir, you've done enough for this evenin', an' a nine hours' sleep is the best trainin' before a battle. Happen this time to-morrow night you'll be safe back again with your £100 in your pocket."

II

Work was struck at one o'clock at the coal-pits and the iron-works, and the fight was arranged for three. From the Croxley Furnaces, from Wilson's Coal-pits, from the Heartsease Mine, from the Dodd Mills, from the Leverworth Smelters the workmen came trooping, each with his fox-terrier or his lurcher at his heels. Warped with labour and twisted by toil, bent double by week-long work in the cramped coal galleries, or half-blinded with years spent in front of white-hot fluid metal, these men still gilded their harsh and hopeless lives

by their devotion to sport. It was their one relief, the only thing which could distract their mind from sordid surroundings, and give them an interest beyond the blackened circle which inclosed them. Literature, art, science, all these things were beyond the horizon; but the race, the football match, the cricket, the fight, these were things which they could understand, which they could speculate upon in advance and comment upon afterward. Sometimes brutal, sometimes grotesque, the love of sport is still one of the great agencies which make for the happiness of our people. It lies very deeply in the springs of our nature, and when it has been educated out, a higher, more refined nature may be left, but it will not be of that robust British type which has left its mark so deeply on the world. Every one of these ruddled workers, slouching with his dog at his heels to see something of the fight, was a true unit of his race.

It was a squally May day, with bright sunbursts and driving showers. Montgomery worked all morning in the surgery getting his medicine made up.

"The weather seems so very unsettled, Mr. Montgomery," remarked the doctor, "that I am inclined to think that you had better postpone your little country excursion until a later date."

"I am afraid that I must go to-day, sir."

"I have just had an intimation that Mrs. Potter, at the other side of Angleton, wishes to see me. It is probable that I shall be there all day. It will be extremely inconvenient to leave the house empty so long."

"I am very sorry, sir, but I must go," said the assistant, doggedly.

The doctor saw that it would be useless to argue, and departed in the worst of bad tempers upon his mission. Montgomery felt easier now that he was gone. He went up to his room, and packed his running-shoes, his fighting-drawers, and his cricket-sash into a hand-bag. When he came down Mr. Wilson was waiting for him in the surgery.

"I hear the doctor has gone."

"Yes; he is likely to be away all day."

"I don't see that it matters much. It's bound to come to his ears by to-night."

"Yes; it's serious with me, Mr. Wilson. If I win, it's all right. I don't mind telling you that the hundred pounds will make all the difference to me. But if I lose, I shall lose my situation, for, as you say, I can't keep it secret."

"Never mind. We'll see you through among us. I only wonder the doctor has not heard, for it's all over the country that you are to fight the Croxley Champion. We've had Armitage up about it already. He's the Master's backer, you know. He wasn't sure that you were eligible. The Master said he wanted you whether you were eligible or not. Armitage has money on, and would have made trouble if he could. But I showed him that you came within the conditions of the challenge, and he agreed that it was all right. They think they have a soft thing on."

"Well, I can only do my best," said Montgomery.

They lunched together; a silent and rather nervous repast, for Montgomery's mind was full of what was before him, and Wilson had himself more money at stake than he cared to lose.

Wilson's carriage and pair were at the door, the

horses with blue-and-white rosettes at their ears, which were the colours of the Wilson Coal-pits, well known on many a football field. At the avenue gate a crowd of some hundred pitmen and their wives gave a cheer as the carriage passed. To the assistant it all seemed dream-like and extraordinary—the strangest experience of his life, but with a thrill of human action and interest in it which made it passionately absorbing. He lay back in the open carriage and saw the fluttering handkerchiefs from the doors and windows of the miners' cottages. Wilson had pinned a blue-and-white rosette upon his coat, and every one knew him as their champion. "Good luck, sir! good luck to thee!" they shouted from the roadside. He felt that it was like some unromantic knight riding down to sordid lists, but there was something of chivalry in it all the same. He fought for others as well as for himself. He might fail from want of skill or strength, but deep in his sombre soul he vowed that it should never be for want of heart.

Mr. Fawcett was just mounting into his high-wheeled, spidery dogcart, with his little bit of blood between the shafts. He waved his whip and fell in behind the carriage. They overtook Purvis, the tomato-faced publican, upon the road, with his wife in her Sunday bonnet. They also dropped into the procession, and then, as they traversed the seven miles of the high-road to Croxley, their two-horsed, rosetted carriage became gradually the nucleus of a comet with a loosely radiating tail. From every side-road came the miners' carts, the humble, ramshackle traps, black and bulging, with their loads of noisy, foul-tongued, open-hearted partisans. They trailed for a long quarter of a

mile behind them—cracking, whipping, shouting, galloping, swearing. Horsemen and runners were mixed with the vehicles. And then suddenly a squad of the Sheffield Yeomanry, who were having their annual training in those parts, clattered and jingled out of a field, and rode as an escort to the carriage. Through the dust-clouds round him Montgomery saw the gleaming brass helmets, the bright coats, and the tossing heads of the chargers, the delighted brown faces of the troopers. It was more dream-like than ever.

And then, as they approached the monstrous, uncouth line of bottle-shaped buildings which marked the smelting-works of Croxley, their long, writhing snake of dust was headed off by another but longer one which wound across their path. The main-road into which their own opened was filled by the rushing current of traps. The Wilson contingent halted until the others should get past. The ironmen cheered and groaned, according to their humour, as they whirled past their antagonist. Rough chaff flew back and forward like iron nuts and splinters of coal. "Brought him up, then!" "Got t' hearse for to fetch him back?" "Where's t' owd K-legs?" "Mon, mon, have thy photograph took—'twill mind thee of what thou used to look!" "He fight?—he's now't but a half-baked doctor!" "Happen he'll doctor thy Croxley Champion afore he's through wi't."

So they flashed at each other as the one side waited and the other passed. Then there came a rolling murmur swelling into a shout, and a great break with four horses came clattering along, all streaming with salmon-pink ribbons. The driver wore a white hat with pink rosette, and beside him,

on the high seat, were a man and a woman—she with her arm round his waist. Montgomery had one glimpse of them as they flashed past: he with a furry cap drawn low over his brow, a great frieze coat, and a pink comforter round his throat; she brazen, red-headed, bright-coloured, laughing excitedly. The Master, for it was he, turned as he passed, gazed hard at Montgomery, and gave him a menacing, gap-toothed grin. It was a hard, wicked face, blue-jowled and craggy, with long, obstinate cheeks and inexorable eyes. The break behind was full of patrons of the sport—flushed iron-foremen, heads of departments, managers. One was drinking from a metal flask, and raised it to Montgomery as he passed; and then the crowd thinned, and the Wilson *cortège* with their dragoons swept in at the rear of the others.

The road led away from Croxley, between curving green hills, gashed and polluted by the searchers for coal and iron. The whole country had been gutted, and vast piles of refuse and mountains of slag suggested the mighty chambers which the labour of man had burrowed beneath. On the left the road curved up to where a huge building, roofless and dismantled, stood crumbling and forlorn, with the light shining through the windowless squares.

"That's the old Arrowsmith's factory. That's where the fight is to be," said Wilson. "How are you feeling now?"

"Thank you. I was never better in my life," Montgomery answered.

"By Gad, I like your nerve!" said Wilson, who was himself flushed and uneasy. "You'll give us a fight for our money, come what may. That place on

the right is the office, and that has been set aside as the dressing and weighing-room."

The carriage drove up to it amidst the shouts of the folk upon the hillside. Lines of empty carriages and traps curved down upon the winding road, and a black crowd surged round the door of the ruined factory. The seats, as a huge placard announced, were five shillings, three shillings, and a shilling, with half-price for dogs. The takings, deducting expenses, were to go to the winner, and it was already evident that a larger stake than a hundred pounds was in question. A babel of voices rose from the door. The workers wished to bring their dogs in free. The men scuffled. The dogs barked. The crowd was a whirling, eddying pool surging with a roar up to the narrow cleft which was its only outlet.

The break, with its salmon-coloured streamers and four reeking horses, stood empty before the door of the office; Wilson, Purvis, Fawcett, and Montgomery passed in.

There was a large, bare room inside with square, clean patches upon the grimy walls, where pictures and almanacs had once hung. Worn linoleum covered the floor, but there was no furniture save some benches and a deal table with a ewer and a basin upon it. Two of the corners were curtained off. In the middle of the room was a weighing-chair. A hugely fat man, with a salmon tie and a blue waist-coat with bird's-eye spots, came bustling up to them. It was Armitage, the butcher and grazier, well known for miles round as a warm man, and the most liberal patron of sport in the Riding.

"Well, well," he grunted, in a thick, fussy,

wheezy voice, "you have come, then. Got your man? Got your man?"

"Here he is, fit and well. Mr. Montgomery, let me present you to Mr. Armitage."

"Glad to meet you, sir. Happy to make your acquaintance. I make bold to say, sir, that we of Croxley admire your courage, Mr. Montgomery, and that our only hope is a fair fight and no favour and the best man win. That's our sentiment at Croxley."

"And it is my sentiment also," said the assistant.

"Well, you can't say fairer than that, Mr. Montgomery. You've taken a large contrac' in hand, but a large contrac' may be carried through, sir, as any one that knows my dealings could testify. The Master is ready to weigh in!"

"So am I."

"You must weigh in the buff."

Montgomery looked askance at the tall, red-headed woman who was standing gazing out of the window.

"That's all right," said Wilson. "Get behind the curtain and put on your fighting-kit."

He did so, and came out the picture of an athlete, in white, loose drawers, canvas shoes, and the sash of a well-known cricket club round his waist. He was trained to a hair, his skin gleaming like silk, and every muscle rippling down his broad shoulders and along his beautiful arms as he moved them. They bunched into ivory knobs, or slid into long, sinuous curves, as he raised or lowered his hands.

"What thinkest thou o' that?" asked Ted Barton, his second, of the woman in the window.

She glanced contemptuously at the young athlete.

"It's but a poor kindness thou dost him to put

a thread-paper yoong gentleman like yon against a mon as is a mon. Why, my Jock would throttle him wi' one hond lashed behind him."

"Happen he may—happen not," said Barton. "I have but twa pund in the world, but it's on him, every penny, and no hedgin'. But here's t' Maister, and rarely fine he do look."

The prize-fighter had come out from his curtain, a squat, formidable figure, monstrous in chest and arms, limping slightly on his distorted leg. His skin had none of the freshness and clearness of Montgomery's, but was dusky and mottled, with one huge mole amid the mat of tangled black hair which thatched his mighty breast. His weight bore no relation to his strength, for those huge shoulders and great arms, with brown, sledge-hammer fists, would have fitted the heaviest man that ever threw his cap into a ring. But his loins and legs were slight in proportion. Montgomery, on the other hand, was as symmetrical as a Greek statue. It would be an encounter between a man who was specially fitted for one sport, and one who was equally capable of any. The two looked curiously at each other: a bulldog, and a high-bred, clean-limbed terrier, each full of spirit.

"How do you do?"

"How do?" The Master grinned again, and his three jagged front teeth gleamed for an instant. The rest had been beaten out of him in twenty years of battle. He spat upon the floor. "We have a rare fine day for't."

"Capital," said Montgomery.

"That's the good feelin' I like," wheezed the fat butcher. "Good lads, both of them!—prime lads! —hard meat an' good bone. There's no ill-feelin'."

"If he downs me, Gawd bless him!" said the Master.

"An' if we down him, Gawd help him!" interrupted the woman.

"Haud thy tongue, wench!" said the Master, impatiently. "Who art thou to put in thy word? Happen I might draw my hand across thy face."

The woman did not take the threat amiss.

"Wilt have enough for thy hand to do, Jock," said she. "Get quit o' this gradely man afore thou turn on me."

The lovers' quarrel was interrupted by the entrance of a new comer, a gentleman with a fur-collared overcoat and a very shiny top-hat—a top-hat of a degree of glossiness which is seldom seen five miles from Hyde Park. This hat he wore at the extreme back of his head, so that the lower surface of the brim made a kind of frame for his high, bald forehead, his keen eyes, his rugged and yet kindly face. He bustled in with the quiet air of possession with which the ring-master enters the circus.

"It's Mr. Stapleton, the referee from London," said Wilson.

"How do you do, Mr. Stapleton? I was introduced to you at the big fight at the Corinthian Club, in Piccadilly."

"Ah, I dare say," said the other, shaking hands. "Fact is, I'm introduced to so many that I can't undertake to carry their names. Wilson, is it? Well, Mr. Wilson, glad to see you. Couldn't get a fly at the station, and that's why I'm late."

"I'm sure, sir," said Armitage, "we should be proud that any one so well known in the boxing world should come down to our little exhibition."

"Not at all. Not at all. Anything in the interests of boxin'. All ready? Men weighed?"

"Weighing now, sir."

"Ah, just as well I should see it done. Seen you before, Craggs. Saw you fight your second battle against Willox. You had beaten him once, but he came back on you. What does the indicator say?—one hundred and sixty-three pounds—two off for the kit—one hundred and sixty-one. Now, my lad, you jump. My goodness, what colours are you wearing?"

"The Anonymi Cricket Club."

"What right have you to wear them? I belong to the club myself."

"So do I."

"You an amateur?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are fighting for a money prize?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know what you are doing? You realise that you're a professional pug from this onward, and that if ever you fight again——"

"I'll never fight again."

"Happen you won't," said the woman, and the Master turned a terrible eye upon her.

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best. Up you jump. One hundred and fifty-one, minus two, one hundred and forty-nine—twelve pounds difference, but youth and condition on the other scale. Well, the sooner we get to work the better, for I wish to catch the seven o'clock express at Hellifield. Twenty three-minute rounds, with one-minute intervals, and Queensberry rules. Those are the conditions, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good, then, we may go across."

The two combatants had overcoats thrown over their shoulders, and the whole party, backers, fighters, seconds, and the referee, filed out of the room. A police inspector was waiting for them in the road. He had a notebook in his hand—that terrible weapon which awes even the London cabman.

"I must take your names, gentlemen, in case it should be necessary to proceed for breach of peace."

"You don't mean to stop the fight?" cried Armitage, in a passion of indignation. "I'm Mr. Armitage, of Croxley, and this is Mr. Wilson, and we'll be responsible that all is fair and as it should be."

"I'll take the names in case it should be necessary to proceed," said the inspector, impassively.

"But you know me well."

"If you was a dook or even a judge it would be all the same," said the inspector. "It's the law, and there's an end. I'll not take upon myself to stop the fight, seeing that gloves are to be used, but I'll take the names of all concerned. Silas Craggs, Robert Montgomery, Edward Barton, James Stapleton, of London. Who seconds Silas Craggs?"

"I do," said the woman. "Yes, you can stare, but it's my job, and no one else's. Anastasia's the name—four a's."

"Craggs?"

"Johnson. Anastasia Johnson. If you jug him, you can jug me."

"Who talked of juggin', ye fool?" growled the Master. "Coom on, Mr. Armitage, for I'm fair sick o' this loiterin'."

The inspector fell in with the procession, and proceeded, as they walked up the hill, to bargain in his official capacity for a front seat, where he could safeguard the interests of the law, and in his private capacity to lay out thirty shillings at seven to one with Mr. Armitage. Through the door they passed, down a narrow lane walled with a dense bank of humanity, up a wooden ladder to a platform, over a rope which was slung waist-high from four corner-stakes, and then Montgomery realised that he was in that ring in which his immediate destiny was to be worked out. On the stake at one corner there hung a blue-and-white streamer. Barton led him across, the overcoat dangling loosely from his shoulders, and he sat down on a wooden stool. Barton and another man, both wearing white sweaters, stood beside him. The so-called ring was a square, twenty feet each way. At the opposite angle was the sinister figure of the Master, with his red-headed woman and a rough-faced friend to look after him. At each corner were metal basins, pitchers of water, and sponges.

During the hubbub and uproar of the entrance Montgomery was too bewildered to take things in. But now there was a few minutes' delay, for the referee had lingered behind, and so he looked quietly about him. It was a sight to haunt him for a lifetime. Wooden seats had been built in, sloping upward to the tops of the walls. Above, instead of a ceiling, a great flight of crows passed slowly across a square of grey cloud. Right up to the topmost benches the folk were banked—broadcloth in front, corduroys and fustian behind; faces turned everywhere upon him. The grey reek of

the pipes filled the building, and the air was pungent with the acrid smell of cheap, strong tobacco. Everywhere among the human faces were to be seen the heads of the dogs. They growled and yapped from the back benches. In that dense mass of humanity one could hardly pick out individuals, but Montgomery's eyes caught the brazen gleam of the helmets held upon the knees of the ten yeomen of his escort. At the very edge of the platform sat the reporters, five of them: three locals, and two all the way from London. But where was the all-important referee? There was no sign of him, unless he were in the centre of that angry swirl of men near the door.

Mr. Stapleton had stopped to examine the gloves which were to be used, and entered the building after the combatants. He had started to come down that narrow lane with the human walls which led to the ring. But already it had gone abroad that the Wilson champion was a gentleman, and that another gentleman had been appointed as referee. A wave of suspicion passed through the Croxley folk. They would have one of their own people for a referee. They would not have a stranger. His path was stopped as he made for the ring. Excited men flung themselves in front of him; they waved their fists in his face and cursed him. A woman howled vile names in his ear. Somebody struck at him with an umbrella. "Go thou back to Lunnon. We want noan o' thee. Go thou back!" they yelled.

Stapleton, with his shiny hat cocked backward, and his large, bulging forehead swelling from under it, looked round him from beneath his bushy brows.

He was in the centre of a savage and dangerous mob. Then he drew his watch from his pocket and held it dial upward in his palm.

"In three minutes," said he, "I will declare the fight off."

They raged round him. His cool face and that aggressive top-hat irritated them. Grimy hands were raised. But it was difficult, somehow, to strike a man who was so absolutely indifferent.

"In two minutes I declare the fight off."

They exploded into blasphemy. The breath of angry men smoked into his placid face. A gnarled, grimy fist vibrated at the end of his nose. "We tell thee we want noan o' thee. Get thou back where thou com'st from."

"In one minute I declare the fight off."

Then the calm persistence of the man conquered the swaying, mutable, passionate crowd.

"Let him through, mon. Happen there'll be no fight after a'."

"Let him through."

"Bill, thou loomp, let him pass. Dost want the fight declared off?"

"Make room for the referee!—room for the Lunnon referee!"

And half pushed, half carried, he was swept up to the ring. There were two chairs by the side of it, one for him and one for the timekeeper. He sat down, his hands on his knees, his hat at a more wonderful angle than ever, impassive but solemn, with the aspect of one who appreciates his responsibilities.

Mr. Armitage, the portly butcher, made his way into the ring and held up two fat hands, sparkling with rings, as a signal for silence.

"Gentlemen!" he yelled. And then in a crescendo shriek, "Gentlemen!"

"And ladies!" cried somebody, for indeed there was a fair sprinkling of women among the crowd. "Speak up, owd man!" shouted another. "What price pork chops?" cried somebody at the back. Everybody laughed, and the dogs began to bark. Armitage waved his hands amidst the uproar as if he were conducting an orchestra. At last the babel thinned into silence.

"Gentlemen," he yelled, "the match is between Silas Craggs, whom we call the Master of Croxley, and Robert Montgomery, of the Wilson coal-pits. The match was to be under eleven-eight. When they were weighed just now Craggs weighed eleven-seven, and Montgomery ten-nine. The conditions of the contest are—the best of twenty three-minute rounds with two-ounce gloves. Should the fight run to its full length it will, of course, be decided upon points. Mr. Stapleton, the well-known London referee, has kindly consented to see fair play. I wish to say that Mr. Wilson and I, the chief backers of the two men, have every confidence in Mr. Stapleton, and that we beg that you will accept his rulings without dispute."

He then turned from one combatant to the other, with a wave of his hand.

III

"MONTGOMERY—Craggs!" said he.

A great hush fell over the huge assembly. Even the dogs stopped yapping; one might have thought that the monstrous room was empty. The two men had stood up, the small white gloves over their hands. They advanced from their corners and shook hands: Montgomery gravely, Craggs with a smile. Then they fell into position. The crowd gave a long sigh—the intake of a thousand excited breaths. The referee tilted his chair on to its back legs, and looked moodily critical from the one to the other.

It was strength against activity—that was evident from the first. The Master stood stolidly upon his K-leg. It gave him a tremendous pedestal; one could hardly imagine his being knocked down. And he could pivot round upon it with extraordinary quickness; but his advance or retreat was ungainly. His frame, however, was so much larger and broader than that of the student, and his brown, massive face looked so resolute and menacing, that the hearts of the Wilson party sank within them. There was one heart, however, which had not done so. It was that of Robert Montgomery.

Any nervousness which he may have had completely passed away now that he had his work before him. Here was something definite—this hard-faced, deformed Hercules to beat, with a career as the price of beating him. He glowed with the joy of action; it thrilled through his nerves. He

faced his man with little in-and-out steps, breaking to the left, breaking to the right, feeling his way, while Craggs, with a dull, malignant eye, pivoted slowly upon his weak leg, his left arm half extended, his right sunk low across the mark. Montgomery led with his left, and then led again, getting lightly home each time. He tried again, but the Master had his counter ready, and Montgomery reeled back from a harder blow than he had given. Anastasia, the woman, gave a shrill cry of encouragement, and her man let fly his right. Montgomery ducked under it, and in an instant the two were in each other's arms.

"Break away! Break away!" said the referee.

The Master struck upward on the break, and shook Montgomery with the blow. Then it was "time." It had been a spirited opening round. The people buzzed into comment and applause. Montgomery was quite fresh, but the hairy chest of the Master was rising and falling. The man passed a sponge over his head, while Anastasia flapped the towel before him. "Good lass! Good lass!" cried the crowd, and cheered her.

The men were up again, the Master grimly watchful, Montgomery as alert as a kitten. The Master tried a sudden rush, squattering along with his awkward gait, but coming faster than one would think. The student slipped aside and avoided him. The Master stopped, grinned, and shook his head. Then he motioned with his hand as an invitation to Montgomery to come to him. The student did so and led with his left, but got a swinging right counter in the ribs in exchange. The heavy blow staggered him, and the Master came scrambling in to complete his advantage; but Montgomery, with

his greater activity, kept out of danger until the call of "time." A tame round, and the advantage with the Master.

"T' Maister's too strong for him," said a smelter to his neighbour.

"Ay; but t'other's a likely lad. Happen we'll see some sport yet. He can joomp rarely."

"But t' Maister can stop and hit rarely. Happen he'll mak' him joomp when he gets his nief upon him."

They were up again, the water glistening upon their faces. Montgomery led instantly and got his right home with a sounding smack upon the Master's forehead. There was a shout from the colliers, and "Silence! Order!" from the referee. Montgomery avoided the counter and scored with his left. Fresh applause, and the referee upon his feet in indignation. "No comments, gentlemen, if *you* please, during the rounds."

"Just bide a bit!" growled the Master.

"Don't talk—fight!" said the referee, angrily.

Montgomery rubbed in the point by a flush hit upon the mouth, and the Master shambled back to his corner like an angry bear, having had all the worst of the round.

"Where's thot seven to one?" shouted Purvis, the publican. "I'll take six to one!"

There were no answers.

"Five to one!" There were givers at that. Purvis booked them in a tattered notebook.

Montgomery began to feel happy. He lay back with with his legs outstretched, his back against the corner-post, and one gloved hand upon each rope. What a delicious minute it was between each round. If he could only keep out of harm's

way, he must surely wear this man out before the end of twenty rounds. He was so slow that all his strength went for nothing. "You're fightin' a winnin' fight—a winnin' fight," Ted Barton whispered in his ear. "Go canny; tak' no chances; you have him proper."

But the Master was crafty. He had fought so many battles with his maimed limb that he knew how to make the best of it. Warily and slowly he manœuvred round Montgomery, stepping forward and yet again forward until he had imperceptibly backed him into his corner. The student suddenly saw a flash of triumph upon the grim face, and a gleam in the dull, malignant eyes. The Master was upon him. He sprang aside and was on the ropes. The Master smashed in one of his terrible upper-cuts, and Montgomery half broke it with his guard. The student sprang the other way and was against the other converging rope. He was trapped in the angle. The Master sent in another, with a hoggish grunt which spoke of the energy behind it. Montgomery ducked, but got a jab from the left upon the mark. He closed with his man. "Break away! Break away!" cried the referee. Montgomery disengaged, and got a swinging blow on the ear as he did so. It had been a damaging round for him, and the Croxley people were shouting their delight.

"Gentlemen, I will *not* have this noise!" Stapleton roared. "I have been accustomed to preside at a well-conducted club, and not at a bear-garden." This little man, with the tilted hat and the bulging forehead, dominated the whole assembly. He was like a headmaster among his boys. He glared round him, and nobody cared to meet his eye.

Anastasia had kissed the Master when he resumed his seat. "Good lass. Do't again!" cried the laughing crowd, and the angry Master shook his glove at her, as she flapped her towel in front of him. Montgomery was weary and a little sore, but not depressed. He had learned something. He would not again be tempted into danger.

For three rounds the honours were fairly equal. The student's hitting was the quicker, the Master's the harder. Profiting by his lesson, Montgomery kept himself in the open, and refused to be herded into a corner. Sometimes the Master succeeded in rushing him to the side-ropes, but the younger man slipped away, or closed and then disengaged. The monotonous "Break away! Break away!" of the referee broke in upon the quick, low patter of rubber-soled shoes, the dull thud of the blows, and the sharp, hissing breath of two tired men.

The ninth round found both of them in fairly good condition. Montgomery's head was still singing from the blow that he had in the corner, and one of his thumbs pained him acutely and seemed to be dislocated. The Master showed no sign of a touch, but his breathing was the more laboured, and a long line of ticks upon the referee's paper showed that the student had a good show of points. But one of this iron-man's blows was worth three of his, and he knew that without the gloves he could not have stood for three rounds against him. All the amateur work that he had done was the merest tapping and flapping when compared to those frightful blows, from arms toughened by the shovel and the crowbar.

It was the tenth round, and the fight was half over. The betting now was only three to one, for

the Wilson champion had held his own much better than had been expected. But those who knew the ring-craft as well as the staying power of the old prize-fighter knew that the odds were still a long way in his favour.

"Have a care of him!" whispered Barton, as he sent his man up to the scratch. "Have a care! He'll play thee a trick, if he can."

But Montgomery saw, or imagined he saw, that his antagonist was tiring. He looked jaded and listless, and his hands drooped a little from their position. His own youth and condition were beginning to tell. He sprang in and brought off a fine left-handed lead. The Master's return lacked his usual fire. Again Montgomery led, and again he got home. Then he tried his right upon the mark, and the Master guarded it downward.

"Too low! Too low! A foul! A foul!" yelled a thousand voices.

The referee rolled his sardonic eyes slowly round. "Seems to me this buildin' is chockful of referees," said he.

The people laughed and applauded, but their favour was as immaterial to him as their anger.

"No applause, please! This is not a theatre!" he yelled.

Montgomery was very pleased with himself. His adversary was evidently in a bad way. He was piling on his points and establishing a lead. He might as well make hay while the sun shone. The Master was looking all abroad. Montgomery popped one upon his blue jowl and got away without a return. And then the Master suddenly dropped both his hands and began rubbing his thigh. Ah! that was it, was it? He had muscular cramp.

"Go in! Go in!" cried Teddy Barton.

Montgomery sprang wildly forward, and the next instant was lying half senseless, with his neck nearly broken, in the middle of the ring,

The whole round had been a long conspiracy to tempt him within reach of one of those terrible right-hand upper-cuts for which the Master was famous. For this the listless, weary bearing, for this the cramp in the thigh. When Montgomery had sprang in so hotly he had exposed himself to such a blow as neither flesh nor blood could stand. Whizzing up from below with a rigid arm, which put the Master's eleven stone into its force, it struck him under the jaw: he whirled half round, and fell a helpless and half-paralysed mass. A vague groan and murmur, inarticulate, too excited for words, rose from the great audience. With open mouths and staring eyes they gazed at the twitching and quivering figure.

"Stand back! Stand right back!" shrieked the referee, for the Master was standing over his man ready to give him the *coup-de-grâce* as he rose.

"Stand back, Craggs, this instant!" Stapleton repeated.

The Master sank his hands sulkily and walked backward to the rope with his ferocious eyes fixed upon his fallen antagonist. The timekeeper called the seconds. If ten of them passed before Montgomery rose to his feet, the fight was ended. Ted Barton wrung his hands and danced about in an agony in his corner.

As if in a dream—a terrible nightmare—the student could hear the voice of the timekeeper—three—four—five—he got up on his hand—six—seven—he was on his knee, sick, swimming, faint,

but resolute to rise. Eight—he was up, and the Master was on him like a tiger, lashing savagely at him with both hands. Folk held their breath as they watched those terrible blows, and anticipated the pitiful end—so much more pitiful where a game but helpless man refuses to accept defeat.

Strangely automatic is the human brain. Without volition, without effort, there shot into the memory of this bewildered, staggering, half-stupefied man the one thing which could have saved him—that blind eye of which the Master's son had spoken. It was the same as the other to look at, but Montgomery remembered that he had said that it was the left. He reeled to the left side, half felled by a drive which lit upon his shoulder. The Master pivoted round upon his leg and was at him in an instant.

"Yark him, lad! yark him!" screamed the woman.

"Hold your tongue!" said the referee.

Montgomery slipped to the left again and yet again; but the Master was too quick and clever for him. He struck round and got him full on the face as he tried once more to break away. Montgomery's knees weakened under him, and he fell with a groan on the floor. This time he knew that he was done. With bitter agony he realised, as he groped blindly with his hands, that he could not possibly raise himself. Far away and muffled he heard, amid the murmurs of the multitude, the fateful voice of the timekeeper counting off the seconds.

"One—two—three—four—five—six——"

"Time!" said the referee.

Then the pent-up passion of the great assembly

broke loose. Croxley gave a deep groan of disappointment. The Wilsons were on their feet, yelling with delight. There was still a chance for them. In four more seconds their man would have been solemnly counted out. But now he had a minute in which to recover. The referee looked round with relaxed features and laughing eyes. He loved this rough game, this school for humble heroes, and it was pleasant for him to intervene as a *Deux ex machinâ* at so dramatic a moment. His chair and his hat were both tilted at an extreme angle; he and the timekeeper smiled at each other. Ted Barton and the other second had rushed out and thrust an arm each under Montgomery's knee, the other behind his loins, and so carried him back to his stool. His head lolled upon his shoulder, but a douche of cold water sent a shiver through him, and he started and looked round him.

"He's a' right!" cried the people round. "He's a rare brave lad. Good lad! Good lad!" Barton poured some brandy into his mouth. The mists cleared a little, and he realised where he was and what he had to do. But he was still very weak, and he hardly dared to hope that he could survive another round.

"Seconds out of the ring!" cried the referee. "Time!"

The Croxley Master sprang eagerly off his stool.

"Keep clear of him! Go easy for a bit," said Barton, and Montgomery walked out to meet his man once more.

He had had two lessons—the one when the Master got him into his corner, the other when he had been lured into mixing it up with so powerful an antagonist. Now he would be wary. Another

blow would finish him; he could afford to run no risks. The Master was determined to follow up his advantage, and rushed at him, slogging furiously right and left. But Montgomery was too young and active to be caught. He was strong upon his legs once more, and his wits had all come back to him. It was a gallant sight—the line-of-battleship trying to pour its overwhelming broadside into the frigate, and the frigate manœuvring always so as to avoid it. The Master tried all his ring-craft. He coaxed the student up by pretended inactivity; he rushed at him with furious rushes toward the ropes. For three rounds he exhausted every wile in trying to get at him. Montgomery during all this time was conscious that his strength was minute by minute coming back to him. The spinal jar from an upper-cut is overwhelming, but evanescent. He was losing all sense of it beyond a great stiffness of the neck. For the first round after his downfall he had been content to be entirely on the defensive, only too happy if he could stall off the furious attacks of the Master. In the second he occasionally ventured upon a light counter. In the third he was smacking back merrily where he saw an opening. His people yelled their approval of him at the end of every round. Even the iron-workers cheered him with that fine unselfishness which true sport engenders. To most of them, unspiritual and unimaginative, the sight of this clean-limbed young Apollo, rising above disaster and holding on while consciousness was in him to his appointed task, was the greatest thing their experience had ever known.

But the Master's naturally morose temper became more and more murderous at this postpone-

exact point of that blue-grained chin. Flesh and blood could not stand such a blow in such a place. Neither valour nor hardihood can save the man to whom it comes. The Master fell backward, flat, prostrate, striking the ground with so simultaneous a clap that it was like a shutter falling from a wall. A yell which no referee could control broke from the crowded benches as the giant went down. He lay upon his back, his knees a little drawn up, his huge chest panting. He twitched and shook, but could not move. His feet pawed convulsively once or twice. It was no use. He was done. "Eight—nine—ten!" said the timekeeper, and the roar of a thousand voices, with a deafening clap like the broadside of a ship, told that the Master of Croxley was the Master no more.

Montgomery stood half dazed, looking down at the huge, prostrate figure. He could hardly realise that it was indeed all over. He saw the referee motion toward him with his hand. He heard his name bellowed in triumph from every side. And then he was aware of some one rushing toward him; he caught a glimpse of a flushed face and an aureole of flying red hair, a gloveless fist struck him between the eyes, and he was on his back in the ring beside his antagonist, while a dozen of his supporters were endeavouring to secure the frantic Anastasia. He heard the angry shouting of the referee, the screaming of the furious woman, and the cries of the mob. Then something seemed to break like an over-stretched banjo-string, and he sank into the deep, deep, mist-girt abyss of unconsciousness.

The dressing was like a thing in a dream, and so was a vision of the Master with the grin of a bull-dog upon his face, and his three teeth amiably pro-

there be behind it, and what chance was there of its harming the colossus in front of him? It was the crisis of the fight. This round must decide it. "Mix it oop, lad; mix it oop!" the iron-men whooped. Even the savage eyes of the referee were unable to restrain the excited crowd.

Now, at last, the chance had come for Montgomery. He had learned a lesson from his more experienced rival. Why should he not play his own game upon him? He was spent, but not nearly so spent as he pretended. That brandy was to call up his reserves, to let him have strength to take full advantage of the opening when it came. It was thrilling and tingling through his veins, at the very moment when he was lurching and rocking like a beaten man. He acted his part admirably. The Master felt that there was an easy task before him, and rushed in with ungainly activity to finish it once for all. He slap-banged away left and right, boring Montgomery up against the ropes, swinging in his ferocious blows with those animal grunts which told of the vicious energy behind them.

But Montgomery was too cool to fall a victim to any of those murderous upper-cuts. He kept out of harm's way with a rigid guard, an active foot, and a head which was swift to duck. And yet he contrived to present the same appearance of a man who is hopelessly done. The Master, weary from his own shower of blows, and fearing nothing from so weak a man, dropped his hand for an instant, and at that instant Montgomery's right came home.

It was a magnificent blow, straight, clean, crisp, with the force of the loins and the back behind it. And it landed where he had meant it to—upon the

exact point of that blue-grained chin. Flesh and blood could not stand such a blow in such a place. Neither valour nor hardihood can save the man to whom it comes. The Master fell backward, flat, prostrate, striking the ground with so simultaneous a clap that it was like a shutter falling from a wall. A yell which no referee could control broke from the crowded benches as the giant went down. He lay upon his back, his knees a little drawn up, his huge chest panting. He twitched and shook, but could not move. His feet pawed convulsively once or twice. It was no use. He was done. "Eight—nine—ten!" said the timekeeper, and the roar of a thousand voices, with a deafening clap like the broadside of a ship, told that the Master of Croxley was the Master no more.

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"So am I!" said Fawcett; "middle-weight champion of the world, that's what he is—here, in the same carriage with us."

But Montgomery was not to be beguiled.

"No; I have my own work to do now."

"And what may that be?"

"I'll use this money to get my medical degree."

"Well, we've plenty of doctors, but you're the only man in the Riding that could smack the Croxley Master off his legs. However, I suppose you know your own business best. When you're a doctor, you'd best come down into these parts, and you'll always find a job waiting for you at the Wilson Coal-pits."

Montgomery had returned by devious ways to the surgery. The horses were smoking at the door, and the doctor was just back from his long journey. Several patients had called in his absence, and he was in the worst of tempers.

"I suppose I should be glad that you have come back at all, Mr. Montgomery!" he snarled. "When next you elect to take a holiday, I trust it will not be at so busy a time."

"I am sorry, sir, that you should have been inconvenienced."

"Yes, sir, I have been exceedingly inconvenienced." Here, for the first time, he looked hard at the assistant. "Good heavens, Mr. Montgomery, what have you been doing with your left eye?"

It was where Anastasia had lodged her protest.

Montgomery laughed. "It is nothing, sir," said he.

"And you have a livid mark under your jaw. It is, indeed, terrible that my representative should

be going about in so disreputable a condition. How did you receive these injuries?"

"Well, sir, as you know, there was a little glove-fight to-day over at Croxley."

"And you got mixed up with that brutal crowd?"

"I *was* rather mixed up with them."

"And who assaulted you?"

"One of the fighters."

"Which of them?"

"The Master of Croxley."

"Good heavens! Perhaps you interfered with him?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I did a little."

"Mr. Montgomery, in such a practice as mine, intimately associated as it is with the highest and most progressive elements of our small community, it is impossible——"

But just then the tentative bray of a cornet-player searching for his keynote jarred upon their ears, and an instant later the Wilson Colliery brass band was in full cry with, "See the Conquering Hero Comes," outside the surgery window. There was a banner waving, and a shouting crowd of miners.

"What is it? What does it mean?" cried the angry doctor.

"It means, sir, that I have, in the only way which was open to me, earned the money which is necessary for my education. It is my duty, Dr. Oldacre, to warn you that I am about to return to the University, and that you should lose no time in appointing my successor."

THE "SLAPPING SAL"

It was in the days when France's power was already broken upon the seas, and when more of her three-deckers lay rotting in the Medway than were to be found in Brest harbour. But her frigates and corvettes still scoured the ocean, closely followed ever by those of her rival. At the uttermost ends of the earth these dainty vessels, with sweet names of girls or of flowers, mangled and shattered each other for the honour of the four yards of bunting which flapped from the end of their gaffs.

It had blown hard in the night, but the wind had dropped with the dawning, and now the rising sun tinted the fringe of the storm-wrack as it dwindled into the west and glinted on the endless crests of the long, green waves. To north and south and west lay a skyline which was unbroken save by the spout of foam when two of the great Atlantic seas dashed each other into spray. To the east was a rocky island, jutting out into craggy points, with a few scattered clumps of palm trees and a pennant of mist streaming out from the bare, conical hill which capped it. A heavy surf beat upon the shore, and, at a safe distance from it, the British 32-gun frigate *Leda*, Captain A. P. Johnson, raised her black, glistening side upon the crest of a wave, or swooped down into an emerald valley, dipping away to the nor'ard under easy sail. On her snow-white quarter-deck stood a stiff little brown-faced man, who swept the horizon with his glass.

"Mr. Wharton!" he cried, with a voice like a rusty hinge.

A thin, knock-kneed officer shambled across the poop to him.

"Yes, sir."

"I've opened the sealed orders, Mr. Wharton."

A glimmer of curiosity shone upon the meagre features of the first lieutenant. The *Leda* had sailed with her consort, the *Dido*, from Antigua the week before, and the admiral's orders had been contained in a sealed envelope.

"We were to open them on reaching the deserted island of Sombriero, lying in north latitude eighteen, thirty-six, west longitude sixty-three, twenty-eight. Sombriero bore four miles to the north-east from our port-bow when the gale cleared, Mr. Wharton."

The lieutenant bowed stiffly. He and the captain had been bosom friends from childhood. They had gone to school together, joined the navy together, fought again and again together, and married into each other's families, but so long as their feet were on the poop the iron discipline of the service struck all that was human out of them and left only the superior and the subordinate. Captain Johnson took from his pocket a blue paper, which crackled as he unfolded it.

"The 32-gun frigates *Leda* and *Dido* (Captains A. P. Johnson and James Munro) are to cruise from the point at which these instructions are read to the mouth of the Caribbean Sea, in the hope of encountering the French frigate *La Gloire* (48), which has recently harassed our merchant ships in that quarter. H.M. frigates are also directed to

hunt down the piratical craft known sometimes as the *Slapping Sal* and sometimes as the *Hairy Hudson*, which has plundered the British ships as per margin, inflicting barbarities upon their crews. She is a small brig, carrying ten light guns, with one twenty-four pound carronade forward. She was last seen upon the 23rd ult. to the north-east of the island of Sombriero.

"(Signed) JAMES MONTGOMERY
"(*Rear Admiral*).

"H.M.S. *Colossus*, Antigua."

"We appear to have lost our consort," said Captain Johnson, folding up his instructions and again sweeping the horizon with his glass. "She drew away after we reefed down. It would be a pity if we met this heavy Frenchman without the *Dido*, Mr. Wharton. Eh?"

The lieutenant twinkled and smiled.

"She has eighteen-pounders on the main and twelves on the poop, sir," said the captain. "She carries four hundred to our two hundred and thirty-one. Captain de Milon is the smartest man in the French service. Oh, Bobby boy, I'd give my hopes of my flag to rub my side up against her!" He turned on his heel, ashamed of his momentary lapse. "Mr. Wharton," said he, looking back sternly over his shoulder, "get those square sails shaken out and bear away a point more to the west."

"A brig on the port-bow," came a voice from the forecastle.

"A brig on the port-bow," said the lieutenant.

The captain sprang upon the bulwarks and held on by the mizzen-shrouds, a strange little figure

with flying skirts and puckered eyes. The lean lieutenant craned his neck and whispered to Smeaton, the second, while officers and men came popping up from below and clustered along the weather-rail, shading their eyes with their hands—for the tropical sun was already clear of the palm trees. The strange brig lay at anchor in the throat of a curving estuary, and it was already obvious that she could not get out without passing under the guns of the frigate. A long, rocky point to the north of her held her in.

"Keep her as she goes, Mr. Wharton," said the captain. "Hardly worth while our clearing for action, Mr. Smeaton, but the men can stand by the guns in case she tries to pass us. Cast loose the bow-chasers and send the small-arm men to the forecastle."

A British crew went to its quarters in those days with the quiet serenity of men on their daily routine. In a few minutes, without fuss or sound, the sailors were knotted round their guns, the marines were drawn up and leaning on their muskets, and the frigate's bowsprit pointed straight for her little victim.

"Is it the *Slapping Sal*, sir?"

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Wharton."

"They don't seem to like the look of us, sir. They've cut their cable and are clapping on sail."

It was evident that the brig meant struggling for her freedom. One little patch of canvas fluttered out above another, and her people could be seen working like madmen in the rigging. She made no attempt to pass her antagonist, but headed up the estuary. The captain rubbed his hands.

"She's making for shoal water, Mr. Wharton, and we shall have to cut her out, sir. She's a footy little brig, but I should have thought a fore-and-after would have been more handy."

"It was a mutiny, sir."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, sir, I heard of it at Manilla: a bad business, sir. Captain and two mates murdered. This Hudson, or Hairy Hudson, as they call him, led the mutiny. He's a Londoner, sir, and a cruel villain as ever walked."

"His next walk will be to Execution Dock, Mr. Wharton. She seems heavily manned. I wish I could take twenty topmen out of her, but they would be enough to corrupt the crew of the ark, Mr. Wharton."

Both officers were looking through their glasses at the brig. Suddenly the lieutenant showed his teeth in a grin, while the captain flushed a deeper red.

"That's Hairy Hudson on the after-rail, sir."

"The low, impertinent blackguard! He'll play some other antics before we are done with him. Could you reach him with the long eighteen, Mr. Smeaton?"

"Another cable length will do it, sir."

The brig yawed as they spoke, and as she came round a spurt of smoke whiffed out from her quarter. It was a pure piece of bravado, for the gun could scarce carry half-way. Then with a jaunty swing the little ship came into the wind again, and shot round a fresh curve in the winding channel.

"The water's shoaling rapidly, sir," repeated the second lieutenant.

"There's six fathoms by the chart."

"Four by the lead, sir."

"When we clear this point we shall see how we lie. Ha! I thought as much! Lay her to, Mr. Wharton. Now we have got her at our mercy!"

The frigate was quite out of sight of the sea now at the head of this river-like estuary. As she came round the curve the two shores were seen to converge at a point about a mile distant. In the angle, as near shore as she could get, the brig was lying with her broadside toward her pursuer and a wisp of black cloth streaming from her mizzen. The lean lieutenant, who had reappeared upon deck with a cutlass strapped to his side and two pistols rammed into his belt, peered curiously at the ensign.

"Is it the Jolly Rodger, sir?" he asked.

But the captain was furious.

"He may hang where his breeches are hanging before I have done with him!" said he. "What boats will you want, Mr. Wharton?"

"We should do it with the launch and the jolly-boat."

"Take four and make a clean job of it. Pipe away the crews at once, and I'll work her in and help you with the long eighteens."

With a rattle of ropes and a creaking of blocks the four boats splashed into the water. Their crews clustered thickly into them: barefooted sailors, stolid marines, laughing middies, and in the sheets of each the senior officers with their stern schoolmaster faces. The captain, his elbows on the binnacle, still watched the distant brig. Her crew were tricing up the boarding-netting, dragging round the starboard guns, knocking new port-holes for them, and making every preparation for a

desperate resistance. In the thick of it all a huge man, bearded to the eyes, with a red nightcap upon his head, was straining and stooping and hauling. The captain watched him with a sour smile, and then snapping up his glass he turned upon his heel. For an instant he stood staring.

"Call back the boats!" he cried in his thin, creaking voice. "Clear away for action there! Cast loose those main-deck guns. Brace back the yards, Mr. Smeaton, and stand by to go about when she has weigh enough."

Round the curve of the estuary was coming a huge vessel. Her great yellow bowsprit and white-winged figure-head were jutting out from the cluster of palm trees, while high above them towered three immense masts with the tricolour flag floating superbly from the mizzen. Round she came, the deep-blue water creaming under her fore foot, until her long, curving, black side, her line of shining copper beneath and of snow-white hammocks above, and the thick clusters of men who peered over her bulwarks, were all in full view. Her lower yards were slung, her ports triced up, and her guns run out all ready for action. Lying behind one of the promontories of the island, the lookout men of the *Gloire* upon the shore had seen the *cul de sac* into which the British frigate was headed, so that Captain de Milon had served the *Leda* as Captain Johnson had the *Slapping Sal*.

But the splendid discipline of the British service was at its best in such a crisis. The boats flew back; their crews clustered aboard, they were swung up at the davits and the fall-ropes made fast. Hammocks were brought up and stowed, bulkheads sent down, ports and magazines opened,

the fires put out in the galley, and the drums beat to quarters. Swarms of men set the head-sails and brought the frigate round, while the gun-crews threw off their jackets and shirts, tightened their belts, and ran out their eighteen-pounders, peering through the open portholes at the stately Frenchman. The wind was very light. Hardly a ripple showed itself upon the clear blue water, but the sails blew gently out as the breeze came over the wooded banks. The Frenchman had gone about also, and both ships were now heading slowly for the sea under fore-and-aft canvas, the *Gloire* a hundred yards in advance. She luffed up to cross the *Leda's* bows, but the British ship came round also, and the two rippled slowly on in such a silence that the ringing of the ramrods as the French marines drove home their charges clanged quite loudly upon the ear.

"Not much sea-room, Mr. Wharton," remarked the captain.

"I have fought actions in less, sir."

"We must keep our distance and trust to our gunnery. She is very heavily manned, and if she got alongside we might find ourselves in trouble."

"I see the shakoes of soldiers aboard of her."

"Two companies of light infantry from Martinique. Now we have her! Hard-a-port, and let her have it as we cross her stern!"

The keen eye of the little commander had seen the surface ripple, which told of a passing breeze. He had used it to dart across the big Frenchman and to rake her with every gun as he passed. But, once past her, the *Leda* had to come back into the wind to keep out of shoal water. The manœuvre brought her on to the starboard side of the French-

man, and the trim little frigate seemed to heel right over under the crashing broadside which burst from the gaping ports. A moment later her topmen were swarming aloft to set her topsails and royals, and she strove to cross the *Gloire's* bows and rake her again. The French captain, however, brought his frigate's head round, and the two rode side by side within easy pistol-shot, pouring broadsides into each other in one of those murderous duels which, could they all be recorded, would mottle our charts with blood.

In that heavy tropical air, with so faint a breeze, the smoke formed a thick bank round the two vessels, from which the topmasts only protruded. Neither could see anything of its enemy save the throbs of fire in the darkness, and the guns were sponged and trained and fired into a dense wall of vapour. On the poop and the forecastle the marines, in two little red lines, were pouring in their volleys, but neither they nor the seaman-gunners could see what effect their fire was having. Nor, indeed, could they tell how far they were suffering themselves, for, standing at a gun, one could but hazily see that upon the right and the left. But above the roar of the cannon came the sharper sound of the piping shot, the crashing of riven planks, and the occasional heavy thud as spar or block came hurtling on to the deck. The lieutenants paced up and down the line of guns, while Captain Johnson fanned the smoke away with his cocked hat and peered eagerly out.

"This is rare, Bobby!" said he, as the lieutenant joined him. Then, suddenly restraining himself, "What have we lost, Mr. Wharton?"

"Our maintopsail yard and our gaff, sir."

"Where's the flag?"

"Gone overboard, sir."

"They'll think we've struck! Lash a boat's ensign on the starboard arm of the mizzen cross-jack-yard."

"Yes, sir."

A round shot dashed the binnacle to pieces between them. A second knocked two marines into a bloody, palpitating mash. For a moment the smoke rose, and the English captain saw that his adversary's heavier metal was producing a horrible effect. The *Leda* was a shattered wreck. Her deck was strewed with corpses. Several of her portholes were knocked into one, and one of her eighteen-pounder guns had been thrown right back on to her breech, and pointed straight up to the sky. The thin line of marines still loaded and fired, but half the guns were silent, and their crews were piled thickly round them.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" yelled the captain.

"Cutlasses, lads, cutlasses!" roared Wharton.

"Hold your volley till they touch!" cried the captain of marines.

The huge loom of the Frenchman was seen bursting through the smoke. Thick clusters of boarders hung upon her sides and shrouds. A final broadside leapt from her ports, and the mainmast of the *Leda*, snapping short off a few feet above the deck, spun into the air and crashed down upon the port guns, killing ten men and putting the whole battery out of action. An instant later the two ships scraped together, and the starboard bower anchor of the *Gloire* caught the mizzen-chains of the *Leda* upon the port side. With a

yell the black swarm of boarders steadied themselves for a spring.

But their feet were never to reach that blood-stained deck. From somewhere there came a well-aimed whiff of grape, and another, and another. The English marines and seamen, waiting with cutlass and musket behind the silent guns, saw with amazement the dark masses thinning and shredding away. At the same time the port broadside of the Frenchman burst into a roar.

"Clear away the wreck!" roared the captain. "What the devil are they firing at?"

"Get the guns clear!" panted the lieutenant. "We'll do them yet, boys."

The wreckage was torn and hacked and splintered until first one gun and then another roared into action again. The Frenchman's anchor had been cut away, and the *Leda* had worked herself free from that fatal hug. But now, suddenly, there was a scurry up the shrouds of the *Gloire*, and a hundred Englishmen were shouting themselves hoarse: "They're running! They're running! They're running!"

And it was true. The Frenchman had ceased to fire, and was intent only upon clapping on every sail that he could carry. But that shouting hundred could not claim it all as their own. As the smoke cleared it was not difficult to see the reason. The ships had gained the mouth of the estuary during the fight, and there, about four miles out to sea, was the *Leda's* consort bearing down under full sail to the sound of the guns. Captain de Milon had done his part for one day, and presently the *Gloire* was drawing off swiftly to the north, while the *Dido* was bowling along at her skirts,

rattling away with her bow-chasers, until a headland hid them both from view.

But the *Leda* lay sorely stricken, with her mainmast gone, her bulwarks shattered, her mizzen-topmast and gaff shot away, her sails like a beggar's rags, and a hundred of her crew dead and wounded. Close beside her a mass of wreckage floated upon the waves. It was the stern-post of a mangled vessel, and across it, in white letters on a black ground, was printed, "*The Slapping Sal.*"

"By the Lord! it was the brig that saved us!" cried Mr. Wharton. "Hudson brought her into action with the Frenchman, and was blown out of the water by a broadside!"

The little captain turned on his heel and paced up and down the deck. Already his crew were plugging the shot-holes, knotting and splicing and mending. When he came back, the lieutenant saw a softening of the stern lines about his eyes and mouth.

"Are they all gone?"

"Every man. They must have sunk with the wreck."

The two officers looked down at the sinister name, and at the stump of wreckage which floated in the discoloured water. Something black washed to and fro beside a splintered gaff and a tangle of halliards. It was the outrageous ensign, and near it a scarlet cap was floating.

"He was a villain, but he was a Briton!" said the captain, at last. "He lived like a dog, but, by God, he died like a man!"

THE LORD OF CHÂTEAU NOIR

It was in the days when the German armies had broken their way across France, and when the shattered forces of the young Republic had been swept away to the north of the Aisne and to the south of the Loire. Three broad streams of armed men had rolled slowly but irresistibly from the Rhine, now meandering to the north, now to the south, dividing, coalescing, but all uniting to form one great lake round Paris. And from this lake there welled out smaller streams, one to the north, one southward to Orleans, and a third westward to Normandy. Many a German trooper saw the sea for the first time when he rode his horse girth-deep into the waves at Dieppe.

Black and bitter were the thoughts of Frenchmen when they saw this weal of dishonour slashed across the fair face of their country. They had fought and they had been overborne. That swarming cavalry, those countless footmen, the masterful guns—they had tried and tried to make head against them. In battalions their invaders were not to be beaten; but man to man, or ten to ten, they were their equals. A brave Frenchman might still make a single German rue the day that he had left his own bank of the Rhine. Thus, unchronicled amid the battles and the sieges, there broke out another war, a war of individuals, with foul murder upon the one side and brutal reprisal on the other.

Colonel von Gramm, of the 24th Posen Infantry,

had suffered severely during this new development. He commanded in the little Norman town of Les Andelys, and his outposts stretched amid the hamlets and farm-houses of the district round. No French force was within fifty miles of him, and yet morning after morning he had to listen to a black report of sentries found dead at their posts, or of foraging parties which had never returned. Then the Colonel would go forth in his wrath, and farmsteadings would blaze and villages tremble; but next morning there was still that same dismal tale to be told. Do what he might, he could not shake off his invisible enemies. And yet, it should not have been so hard, for from certain signs in common, in the plan and in the deed, it was certain that all these outrages came from a single source.

Colonel von Gramm had tried violence and it had failed. Gold might be more successful. He published it abroad over the countryside that five hundred francs would be paid for information. There was no response. Then eight hundred. The peasants were incorruptible. Then, goaded on by a murdered corporal, he rose to a thousand, and so bought the soul of François Rejane, farm labourer, whose Norman avarice was a stronger passion than his French hatred.

"You say that you know who did these crimes?" asked the Prussian Colonel, eyeing with loathing the blue-bloused, rat-faced creature before him.

"Yes, Colonel."

"And it was——?"

"Those thousand francs, Colonel——"

"Not a sou until your story has been tested. Come! Who is it who has murdered my men?"

"It is Count Eustace of Château Noir."

"You lie!" cried the Colonel, angrily. "A gentleman and a nobleman could not have done such crimes."

The peasant shrugged his shoulders.

"It is evident to me that you do not know the Count. It is this way, Colonel. What I tell you is the truth, and I am not afraid that you should test it. The Count of Château Noir is a hard man: even at the best time he was a hard man. But of late he has been terrible. It was his son's death, you know. His son was under Douay, and he was taken, and then in escaping from Germany he met his death. It was the Count's only child, and indeed we all think that it has driven him mad. With his peasants he follows the German armies. I do not know how many he has killed, but it is he who cuts the cross upon the foreheads, for it is the badge of his house."

It was true. The murdered sentries had each had a saltire cross slashed across their brows, as by a hunting-knife. The Colonel bent his stiff back and ran his forefinger over the map which lay upon the table.

"The Château Noir is not more than four leagues," he said.

"Three and a kilomètre, Colonel."

"You know the place?"

"I used to work there."

Colonel von Gramm rang the bell.

"Give this man food and detain him," said he to the sergeant.

"Why detain me, Colonel? I can tell you no more."

"We shall need you as guide."

"As guide! But the Count? If I were to fall into his hands? Ah, Colonel——"

The Prussian commander waved him away.

"Send Captain Baumgarten to me at once," said he.

The officer who answered the summons was a man of middle age, heavy-jawed, blue-eyed, with a curving yellow moustache, and a brick-red face which turned to an ivory white where his helmet had sheltered it. He was bald, with a shining, tightly-stretched scalp, at the back of which, as in a mirror, it was a favourite mess-joke of the subalterns to trim their moustaches. As a soldier he was slow, but reliable and brave. The Colonel could trust him where a more dashing officer might be in danger.

"You will proceed to Château Noir to-night, Captain," said he. "A guide has been provided. You will arrest the Count and bring him back. If there is an attempt at rescue, shoot him at once."

"How many men shall I take, Colonel?"

"Well, we are surrounded by spies, and our only chance is to pounce upon him before he knows that we are on the way. A large force will attract attention. On the other hand, you must not risk being cut off."

"I might march north, Colonel, as if to join General Goeben. Then I could turn down this road which I see upon your map, and get to Château Noir before they could hear of us. In that case, with twenty men——"

"Very good, Captain. I hope to see you with your prisoner to-morrow morning."

It was a cold December night when Captain Baumgarten marched out of Les Andelys with his

twenty Poseners, and took the main road to the north-west. Two miles out he turned suddenly down a narrow, deeply-rutted track, and made swiftly for his man. A thin, cold rain was falling, swishing among the tall poplar trees and rustling in the fields on either side. The Captain walked first with Moser, a veteran sergeant, beside him. The sergeant's wrist was fastened to that of the French peasant, and it had been whispered in his ear that in case of an ambush the first bullet fired would be through his head. Behind them the twenty infantrymen plodded along through the darkness with their faces sunk to the rain, and their boots squeaking in the soft, wet clay. They knew where they were going and why, and the thought upheld them, for they were bitter at the loss of their comrades. It was a cavalry job, they knew, but the cavalry were all on with the advance, and, besides, it was more fitting that the regiment should avenge its own dead men.

It was nearly eight when they left Les Andelys. At half-past eleven their guide stopped at a place where two high pillars, crowned with some heraldic stonework, flanked a huge iron gate. The wall in which it had been the opening had crumbled away, but the great gate still towered above the brambles and weeds which had overgrown its base. The Prussians made their way round it, and advanced stealthily, under the shadow of a tunnel of oak branches, up the long avenue, which was still cumbered by the leaves of last autumn. At the top they halted and reconnoitred.

The black château lay in front of them. The moon had shone out between two rain-clouds, and threw the old house into silver and shadow. It

was shaped like an L, with a low arched door in front, and lines of small windows like the open ports of a man-of-war. Above was a dark roof breaking at the corners into little round overhanging turrets, the whole lying silent in the moonshine, with a drift of ragged clouds blackening the heavens behind it. A single light gleamed in one of the lower windows.

The Captain whispered his orders to his men. Some were to creep to the front door, some to the back. Some were to watch the east, and some the west. He and the sergeant stole on tiptoe to the lighted window.

It was a small room into which they looked, very meanly furnished. An elderly man in the dress of a menial was reading a tattered paper by the light of a guttering candle. He leaned back in his wooden chair with his feet upon a box, while a bottle of white wine stood with a half-filled tumbler upon a stool beside him. The sergeant thrust his needle-gun through the glass, and the man sprang to his feet with a shriek.

"Silence, for your life! The house is surrounded and you cannot escape. Come round and open the door, or we will show you no mercy when we come in."

"For God's sake, don't shoot! I will open it! I will open it!" He rushed from the room with his paper still crumpled up in his hand. An instant later, with a groaning of old locks and a rasping of bars, the low door swung open, and the Prussians poured into the stone-flagged passage.

"Where is Count Eustace de Château Noir?"

"My master! He is out, sir."

"Out at this time of night? Your life for a lie!"

"It is true, sir. He is out."

"Where?"

"I do not know."

"Doing what?"

"I cannot tell. No, it is no use your cocking your pistol, sir. You may kill me, but you cannot make me tell you that which I do not know."

"Is he often out at this hour?"

"Frequently."

"And when does he come home?"

"Before daybreak."

Captain Baumgarten rasped out a German oath. He had had his journey for nothing, then. The man's answers were only too likely to be true. It was what he might have expected. But at least he would search the house and make sure. Leaving a picket at the front door and another at the back, the sergeant and he drove the trembling butler in front of them—his shaking candle sending strange, flickering shadows over the old tapestries and the low, oak-raftered ceilings. They searched the whole house, from the huge, stone-flagged kitchen below to the dining-hall on the second floor with its gallery for musicians, and its panelling black with age, but nowhere was there a living creature. Up above in an attic they found Marie, the elderly wife of the butler; but the owner kept no other servants, and of his own presence there was no trace.

It was long, however, before Captain Baumgarten had satisfied himself upon the point. It was a difficult house to search. Thin stairs, which only one man could ascend at a time, connected lines of tortuous corridors. The walls were so thick that each room was cut off from its neighbour. Huge fireplaces yawned in each, while the windows were

six feet deep in the wall. Captain Baumgarten stamped with his feet, and tore down curtains, and struck with the pommel of his sword. If there were secret hiding-places, he was not fortunate enough to find them.

"I have an idea," said he, at last, speaking in German to the sergeant. "You will place a guard over this fellow, and make sure that he communicates with no one."

"Yes, Captain."

"And you will place four men in ambush at the front and at the back. It is likely enough that about daybreak our bird may return to the nest."

"And the others, Captain?"

"Let them have their suppers in the kitchen. This fellow will serve you with meat and wine. It is a wild night, and we shall be better here than on the country road."

"And yourself, Captain?"

"I will take my supper up here in the dining-hall. The logs are laid and we can light the fire. You will call me if there is any alarm. What can you give me for supper—you?"

"Alas, monsieur, there was a time when I might have answered, 'What you wish!' but now it is all that we can do to find a bottle of new claret and a cold pullet."

"That will do very well. Let a guard go about with him, sergeant, and let him feel the end of a bayonet if he plays us any tricks."

Captain Baumgarten was an old campaigner. In the Eastern provinces, and before that in Bohemia, he had learned the art of quartering himself upon the enemy. While the butler brought his supper he occupied himself in making his prepara-

tions for a comfortable night. He lit the candelabrum of ten candles upon the centre table. The fire was already burning up, crackling merrily, and sending spurts of blue, pungent smoke into the room. The Captain walked to the window and looked out. The moon had gone in again, and it was raining heavily. He could hear the deep sough of the wind and see the dark loom of the trees, all swaying in the one direction. It was a sight which gave a zest to his comfortable quarters, and to the cold fowl and the bottle of wine which the butler had brought up for him. He was tired and hungry after his long tramp, so he threw his sword, his helmet, and his revolver-belt down upon a chair, and fell to eagerly upon his supper. Then, with his glass of wine before him and his cigar between his lips, he tilted his chair back and looked about him.

He sat within a small circle of brilliant light which gleamed upon his silver shoulder-straps, and threw out his terra-cotta face, his heavy eyebrows, and his yellow moustache. But outside that circle things were vague and shadowy in the old dining-hall. Two sides were oak-panelled and two were hung with faded tapestry, across which huntsmen and dogs and stags were still dimly streaming. Above the fireplace were rows of heraldic shields with the blazonings of the family and of its alliances, the fatal saltire cross breaking out on each of them.

Four paintings of old seigneurs of Château Noir faced the fireplace, all men with hawk noses and bold, high features, so like each other that only the dress could distinguish the Crusader from the Cavalier of the Fronde. Captain Baumgarten, heavy

with his repast, lay back in his chair looking up at them through the clouds of his tobacco smoke, and pondering over the strange chance which had sent him, a man from the Baltic coast, to eat his supper in the ancestral hall of these proud Norman chieftains. But the fire was hot, and the Captain's eyes were heavy. His chin sank slowly upon his chest, and the ten candles gleamed upon the broad white scalp.

Suddenly a slight noise brought him to his feet. For an instant it seemed to his dazed senses that one of the pictures opposite had walked from its frame. There, beside the table, and almost within arm's length of him, was standing a huge man, silent, motionless, with no sign of life save his fierce, glinting eyes. He was black-haired, olive-skinned, with a pointed tuft of black beard, and a great, fierce nose, toward which all his features seemed to run. His cheeks were wrinkled like a last year's apple, but his sweep of shoulder, and bony, corded hands, told of a strength which was unsapped by age. His arms were folded across his arching chest, and his mouth was set in a fixed smile.

"Pray do not trouble yourself to look for your weapons," he said, as the Prussian cast a swift glance at the empty chair in which they had been laid. "You have been, if you will allow me to say so, a little indiscreet to make yourself so much at home in a house every wall of which is honeycombed with secret passages. You will be amused to hear that forty men were watching you at your supper. Ah! what then?"

Captain Baumgarten had taken a step forward with clenched fists. The Frenchman held up the revolver which he grasped in his right hand, while

with the left he hurled the German back into his chair.

"Pray keep your seat," said he. "You have no cause to trouble about your men. They have already been provided for. It is astonishing with these stone floors how little one can hear what goes on beneath. You have been relieved of your command, and have now only to think of yourself. May I ask what your name is?"

"I am Captain Baumgarten, of the 24th Posen Regiment."

"Your French is excellent, though you incline, like most of your countrymen, to turn the 'p' into a 'b.' I have been amused to hear them cry 'avez bitié sur moi!' You know, doubtless, who it is who addresses you."

"The Count of Château Noir."

"Precisely. It would have been a misfortune if you had visited my château and I had been unable to have a word with you. I have had to do with many German soldiers, but never with an officer before. I have much to talk to you about."

Captain Baumgarten sat still in his chair. Brave as he was, there was something in this man's manner which made his skin creep with apprehension. His eyes glanced to right and to left, but his weapons were gone, and in a struggle he saw that he was but a child to this gigantic adversary. The Count had picked up the claret bottle and held it to the light.

"Tut! tut!" said he. "And was this the best that Pierre could do for you? I am ashamed to look you in the face, Captain Baumgarten. We must improve upon this."

He blew a call upon a whistle, which hung from

his shooting-jacket. The old manservant was in the room in an instant.

"Chambertin from bin 15!" he cried, and a minute later a grey bottle streaked with cobwebs was carried in as a nurse bears an infant. The Count filled two glasses to the brim.

"Drink!" said he. "It is the very best in my cellars, and not to be matched between Rouen and Paris. Drink, sir, and be happy! There are cold joints below. There are two lobsters fresh from Honfleur. Will you not venture upon a second and more savoury supper?"

The German officer shook his head. He drained the glass, however, and his host filled it once more, pressing him to give an order for this or that dainty.

"There is nothing in my house which is not at your disposal. You have but to say the word. Well, then, you will allow me to tell you a story while you drink your wine. I have so longed to tell it to some German officer. It is about my son, my only child, Eustace, who was taken and died in escaping. It is a curious little story, and I think that I can promise you that you will never forget it.

"You must know, then, that my boy was in the artillery, a fine young fellow, Captain Baumgarten, and the pride of his mother. She died within a week of the news of his death reaching us. It was brought by a brother officer who was at his side throughout, and who escaped while my lad died. I want to tell you all that he told me.

"Eustace was taken at Weissenburg on the 4th of August. The prisoners were broken up into parties, and sent back into Germany by different

routes. Eustace was taken upon the 5th to a village called Lauterburg, where he met with kindness from the German officer in command. This good Colonel had the hungry lad to supper, offered him the best he had, opened a bottle of good wine, as I have tried to do for you, and gave him a cigar from his own case. Might I entreat you to take one from mine?"

The German again shook his head. His horror of his companion had increased as he sat watching the lips that smiled and the eyes that glared.

"The Colonel, as I say, was good to my boy. But, unluckily, the prisoners were moved next day across the Rhine to Ettlingen. They were not equally fortunate there. The officer who guarded them was a ruffian and a villain, Captain Baumgarten. He took a pleasure in humiliating and ill-treating the brave men who had fallen into his power. That night, upon my son answering fiercely back to some taunt of his, he struck him in the eye, like this!"

The crash of the blow rang through the hall. The German's face fell forward, his hand up, and blood oozing through his fingers. The Count settled down in his chair once more.

"My boy was disfigured by the blow, and this villain made his appearance the object of his jeers. By the way, you look a little comical yourself at the present moment, Captain, and your Colonel would certainly say that you had been getting into mischief. To continue, however, my boy's youth and his destitution—for his pockets were empty—moved the pity of a kind-hearted major, and he advanced him ten Napoleons from his own pocket

without security of any kind. Into your hands, Captain Baumgarten, I return these ten gold pieces, since I cannot learn the name of the lender. I am grateful from my heart for this kindness shown to my boy.

"The vile tyrant who commanded the escort accompanied the prisoners to Durlach, and from there to Carlsruhe. He heaped every outrage upon my lad, because the spirit of the Château Noir would not stoop to turn away his wrath by feigned submission. Ay, this cowardly villain, whose heart's blood shall yet clot upon this hand, dared to strike my son with his open hand, to kick him, to tear hair from his moustache—to use him thus—and thus—and thus!"

The German writhed and struggled. He was helpless in the hands of this huge giant whose blows were raining upon him. When at last, blinded and half-senseless he staggered to his feet, it was only to be hurled back again into the great oaken chair. He sobbed in his impotent anger and shame.

"My boy was frequently moved to tears by the humiliation of his position," continued the Count. "You will understand me when I say that it is a bitter thing to be helpless in the hands of an insolent and remorseless enemy. On arriving at Carlsruhe, however, his face, which had been wounded by the brutality of his guard, was bound up by a young Bavarian subaltern who was touched by his appearance. I regret to see that your eye is bleeding so. Will you permit me to bind it with my silk handkerchief?"

He leaned forward, but the German dashed his hand aside.

"I am in your power, you monster!" he cried; "I can endure your brutalities, but not your hypocrisy."

The Count shrugged his shoulders. "I am taking things in their order, just as they occurred," said he. "I was under vow to tell it to the first German officer with whom I could talk *tète-à-tète.* Let me see, I had got as far as the young Bavarian at Carlsruhe. I regret extremely that you will not permit me to use such slight skill in surgery as I possess. At Carlsruhe, my lad was shut up in the old caserne, where he remained for a fortnight. The worst pang of his captivity was that some unmannerly curs in the garrison would taunt him with his position as he sat by his window in the evening. That reminds me, Captain, that you are not quite situated upon a bed of roses yourself, are you, now? You came to trap a wolf, my man, and now the beast has you down with his fangs in your throat. A family man, too, I should judge, by that well-filled tunic. Well, a widow the more will make little matter, and they do not usually remain widows long. Get back into the chair, you dog!"

"Well, to continue my story—at the end of a fortnight my son and his friend escaped. I need not trouble you with the dangers which they ran, or with the privations which they endured. Suffice it that to disguise themselves they had to take the clothes of two peasants, whom they waylaid in a wood. Hiding by day and travelling by night, they had got as far into France as Remilly, and were within a mile—a single mile, Captain—of crossing the German lines when a patrol of Uhlans came right upon them. Ah! it was hard, was it

not, when they had come so far and were so near to safety?"

The Count blew a double call upon his whistle, and three hard-faced peasants entered the room.

"These must represent my Uhlans," said he. "Well, then, the Captain in command, finding that these men were French soldiers in civilian dress within the German lines, proceeded to hang them without trial or ceremony. I think, Jean, that the centre beam is the strongest."

The unfortunate soldier was dragged from his chair to where a noosed rope had been flung over one of the huge oaken rafters which spanned the room. The cord was slipped over his head, and he felt its harsh grip round his throat. The three peasants seized the other end, and looked to the Count for his orders. The officer, pale, but firm, folded his arms and stared defiantly at the man who tortured him.

"You are now face to face with death, and I perceive from your lips that you are praying. My son was also face to face with death, and he prayed, also. It happened that a general officer came up, and he heard the lad praying for his mother, and it moved him so—he being himself a father—that he ordered his Uhlans away, and he remained with his aide-de-camp only, beside the condemned men. And when he heard all the lad had to tell, that he was the only child of an old family, and that his mother was in failing health, he threw off the rope as I throw off this, and he kissed him on either cheek, as I kiss you, and he bade him go, as I bid you go, and may every kind wish of that noble General, though it could not stave off the fever

which slew my son, descend now upon your head."

And so it was that Captain Baumgarten, disfigured, blinded, and bleeding, staggered out into the wind and the rain of that wild December dawn.

A SHADOW BEFORE

THE 15th of July, 1870, found John Worlington Dodds a ruined gamester of the Stock Exchange. Upon the 17th he was a very opulent man. And yet he had effected the change without leaving the penurious little Irish townlet of Dunsloe, which could have been bought outright for a quarter of the sum which he had earned during the single day that he was within its walls. There is a romance of finance yet to be written, a story of huge forces which are for ever waxing and waning, of bold operations, of breathless suspense, of agonised failure, of deep combinations which are baffled by others still more subtle. The mighty debts of each great European Power stand like so many columns of mercury, for ever rising and falling to indicate the pressure upon each. He who can see far enough into the future to tell how that ever-varying column will stand to-morrow is the man who has fortune within his grasp.

John Worlington Dodds had many of the gifts which lead a speculator to success. He was quick in observing, just in estimating, prompt and fearless in acting. But in finance there is always the element of luck, which, however one may eliminate it, still remains, like the blank at roulette, a constantly present handicap upon the operator. And so it was that Worlington Dodds had come to grief. On the best advices he had dabbled in the funds of a South American Republic in the

days before South American Republics had been found out. The Republic defaulted, and Dodds lost his money. He had bulled the shares of a Scotch railway, and a four months' strike had hit him hard. He had helped to underwrite a coffee company in the hope that the public would come along upon the feed and gradually nibble away some of his holding, but the political sky had been clouded and the public had refused to invest. Everything which he had touched had gone wrong, and now, on the eve of his marriage, young, clear-headed, and energetic, he was actually a bankrupt had his creditors chosen to make him one. But the Stock Exchange is an indulgent body. What is the case of one to-day may be that of another to-morrow, and every one is interested in seeing that the stricken man is given time to rise again. So the burden of Worlington Dodds was lightened for him, many shoulders helped to bear it, and he was able to go for a little summer tour into Ireland, for the doctors had ordered him rest and change of air to restore his shaken nervous system. Thus it was that upon the 15th of July, 1870, he found himself at his breakfast in the fly-blown coffee-room of the George Hotel in the market square of Dunsloe.

It is a dull and depressing coffee-room and one which is usually empty, but on this particular day it was as crowded and noisy as that of any London hotel. Every table was occupied, and a thick smell of fried bacon and of fish hung in the air. Heavily-booted men clattered in and out, spurs jingled, riding-crops were stacked in corners, and there was a general atmosphere of horse. The conversation, too, was of nothing else. From every side Worl-

ington Dodds heard of yearlings, of wind-galls, of roarers, of spavins, of cribsuckers, of a hundred other terms which were as unintelligible to him as his own Stock Exchange jargon would have been to the company. He asked the waiter for the reason of it all, and the waiter was an astonished man that there should be any one in this world who did not know it.

"Shure it's the Dunsloe horse-fair, your honour —the greatest horse-fair in all Oireland. It lasts for a wake, and the folk come from far an' near— from England an' Scotland an' iverywhere. If you look out of the winder, your honour, you'll see the horses, and it's asy your honour's conscience must be, or you wouldn't slape so sound that the cratures didn't rouse you with their clatter."

Dodds had a recollection that he had heard a confused murmur, which had interwoven itself with his dreams—a sort of steady rhythmic beating and clanking—and now, when he looked through the window, he saw the cause of it. The square was packed with horses from end to end—greys, bays, browns, blacks, chestnuts—young ones and old, fine ones and coarse, horses of every conceivable sort and size. It seemed a huge function for so small a town, and he remarked as much to the waiter.

"Well, you see, your honour, the horses don't live in the town, an' they don't vex their heads how small it is. But it's in the very centre of the horse-bradin' districts of Oireland, so where should they come to be sould if it wasn't to Dunsloe?"

The waiter had a telegram in his hand, and he turned the address to Worlington Dodds.

"Shure I never heard such a name, sorr. Maybe you could tell me who owns it?"

Dodds looked at the envelope. Strellenhaus was the name.

"No, I don't know," said he. "I never heard it before. It's a foreign name. Perhaps if you were——"

But at that moment a little round-faced, ruddy-cheeked gentleman, who was breakfasting at the next table, leaned forward and interrupted him.

"Did you say a foreign name, sir?" said he.

"Strellenhaus is the name."

"I am Mr. Strellenhaus—Mr. Julius Strellenhaus of Liverpool. I was expecting a telegram. Thank you very much."

He sat so near that Dodds, without any wish to play the spy, could not help to some extent overlooking him as he opened the envelope. The message was a very long one. Quite a wad of melon-tinted paper came out from the tawny envelope. Mr. Strellenhaus arranged the sheets methodically upon the table-cloth in front of him, so that no eye but his own could see them. Then he took out a note-book, and, with an anxious face, he began to make entries in it, glancing first at the telegram and then at the book, and writing apparently one letter or figure at a time. Dodds was interested, for he knew exactly what the man was doing. He was working out a cipher. Dodds had often done it himself. And then suddenly the little man turned very pale, as if the full purport of the message had been a shock to him. Dodds had done that also, and his sympathies were all with his neighbour. Then the stranger rose, and, leaving his breakfast untasted, he walked out of the room.

"I'm thinkin' that the gintleman has had bad news, sorr," said the confidential waiter.

"Looks like it," Dodds answered; and at that moment his thoughts were suddenly drawn off into another direction.

The boots had entered the room with a telegram in his hand.

"Where's Mr. Mancune?" said he to the waiter.

"Well, there are some quare names about. What was it you said?"

"Mr. Mancune," said the boots, glancing round him. "Ah, there he is!" and he handed the telegram to a gentleman who was sitting reading the paper in a corner.

Dodds's eyes had already fallen upon this man, and he had wondered vaguely what he was doing in such company. He was a tall, white-haired, eagle-nosed gentleman, with a waxed moustache and a carefully pointed beard—an aristocratic type which seemed out of its element among the rough, hearty, noisy dealers who surrounded him. This, then, was Mr. Mancune, for whom the second telegram was intended.

As he opened it, tearing it open with a feverish haste, Dodds could perceive that it was as bulky as the first one. He observed also, from the delay in reading it, that it was also in some sort of cipher, The gentleman did not write down any translation of it, but he sat for some time with his nervous, thin fingers twitching amongst the hairs of his white beard, and his shaggy brows bent in the deepest and most absorbed attention whilst he mastered the meaning of it. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet, his eyes flashed, his cheeks flushed, and in his excitement he crumpled the message up in his hand. With an effort he mastered his emo-

tion, put the paper into his pocket, and walked out of the room.

This was enough to excite a less astute and imaginative man than Worlington Dodds. Was there any connection between these two messages, or was it merely a coincidence? Two men with strange names receive two telegrams within a few minutes of each other, each of a considerable length, each in cipher, and each causing keen emotion to the man who received it. One turned pale. The other sprang excitedly to his feet. It might be a coincidence, but it was a very curious one. If it was not a coincidence, then what could it mean? Were they confederates who pretended to work apart, but who each received identical orders from some person at a distance? That was possible, and yet there were difficulties in the way. He puzzled and puzzled, but could find no satisfactory solution to the problem. All breakfast he was turning it over in his mind.

When breakfast was over he sauntered out into the market square, where the horse sale was already in progress. The yearlings were being sold first—tall, long-legged, skittish, wild-eyed creatures, who had run free upon the upland pastures, with ragged hair and towsey manes, but hardy, inured to all weathers, and with the makings of splendid hunters and steeple-chasers when corn and time had brought them to maturity. They were largely of thoroughbred blood, and were being bought by English dealers, who would invest a few pounds now on what they might sell for fifty guineas in a year, if all went well. It was a legitimate speculation, for the horse is a delicate creature, he is afflicted with many ailments, the least accident may destroy his

value, he is a certain expense and an uncertain profit, and for one who comes safely to maturity several may bring no return at all. So the English horse-dealers took their risks as they bought up the shaggy Irish yearlings. One man with a ruddy face and a yellow overcoat took them by the dozen, with as much *sang froid* as if they had been oranges, entering each bargain in a bloated notebook. He bought forty or fifty during the time that Dodds was watching him.

"Who is that?" he asked his neighbour, whose spurs and gaiters showed that he was likely to know.

The man stared in astonishment at the stranger's ignorance.

"Why, that's Jim Holloway, the great Jim Holloway," said he; then, seeing by the blank look upon Dodds's face that even this information had not helped him much, he went into details. "Sure he's the head of Holloway and Morland, of London," said he. "He's the buying partner, and he buys cheap; and the other stays at home and sells, and he sells dear. He owns more horses than any man in the world, and asks the best money for them. I dare say you'll find that half of what are sold at the Dunsloe fair this day will go to him, and he's got such a purse that there's not a man who can bid against him."

Worlington Dodds watched the doings of the great dealer with interest. He had passed on now to the two-year-olds and three-year-olds, full-grown horses, but still a little loose in the limb and weak in the bone. The London buyer was choosing his animals carefully, but having chosen them, the vigour of his competition drove all other bidders

out of it. With a careless nod he would run the figure up five pounds at a time, until he was left in possession of the field. At the same time he was a shrewd observer, and when, as happened more than once, he believed that some one was bidding against him simply in order to run him up, the head would cease suddenly to nod, the note-book would be closed with a snap, and the intruder would be left with a purchase which he did not desire upon his hands. All Dodds's business instincts were aroused by the tactics of this great operator, and he stood in the crowd watching with the utmost interest all that occurred.

It is not to buy young horses, however, that the great dealers come to Ireland, and the real business of the fair commenced when the four and five-year-olds were reached; the full-grown, perfect horses at their prime and ready for any work or any fatigue. Seventy magnificent creatures had been brought down by a single breeder, a comfortable-looking, keen-eyed, ruddy-cheeked gentleman who stood beside the salesman and whispered cautions and precepts into his ear.

"That's Flynn of Kildare," said Dodds's informant. "Jack Flynn has brought down that string of horses, and the other large string over yonder belongs to Tom Flynn, his brother. The two of them together are the two first breeders in Ireland."

A crowd had gathered in front of the horses. By common consent a place had been made for Mr. Holloway, and Dodds could catch a glimpse of his florid face and yellow covert-coat in the front rank. He had opened his note-book and was tapping his teeth reflectively with his pencil as he eyed the horses.

"You'll see a fight now between the first seller and the first buyer in the country," said Dodds's acquaintance. "They are a beautiful string, anyhow. I shouldn't be surprised if he didn't average five-and-thirty pound apiece for the lot as they stand."

The salesman had mounted upon a chair, and his keen, clean-shaven face overlooked the crowd. Mr. Jack Flynn's grey whiskers were at his elbow, and Mr. Holloway immediately in front.

"You've seen these horses, gentlemen," said the salesman, with a backward sweep of his hand toward the line of tossing heads and streaming manes. "When you know that they are bred by Mr. Jack Flynn, at his place in Kildare, you will have a guarantee of their quality. They are the best that Ireland can produce, and in this class of horse the best that Ireland can produce are the best in the world, as every riding man knows well. Hunters or carriage horses, all warranted sound and bred from the best stock. There are seventy in Mr. Jack Flynn's string, and he bids me say that if any wholesale dealer would make one bid for the whole lot, to save time, he would have the preference over any purchaser."

There was a pause and a whisper from the crowd in front, with some expressions of discontent. By a single sweep all the small dealers had been put out of it. It was only a long purse which could buy on such a scale as that. The salesman looked round him inquiringly.

"Come, Mr. Holloway," said he, at last. "You didn't come over here for the sake of the scenery. You may travel the country and not see such another string of horses. Give us a starting bid."

The great dealer was still rattling his pencil upon his front teeth.

"Well," said he, at last, "they *are* a fine lot of horses, and I won't deny it. They do you credit, Mr. Flynn, I am sure. All the same, I didn't mean to fill a ship at a single bid in this fashion. I like to pick and choose my horses."

"In that case Mr. Flynn is quite prepared to sell them in smaller lots," said the salesman. "It was rather for the convenience of a wholesale customer that he was prepared to put them all up together. But if no gentleman wishes to bid——"

"Wait a minute," said a voice. "They are very fine horses, these, and I will give you a bid to start you. I will give you twenty pounds each for the string of seventy."

There was a rustle as the crowd all swayed their heads to catch a glimpse of the speaker. The salesman leaned forward.

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Strellenhaus—Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool."

"It's a new firm," said Dodds's neighbour. "I thought I knew them all, but I never heard of him before."

The salesman's head had disappeared, for he was whispering with the breeder. Now he suddenly straightened himself again.

"Thank you for giving us a lead, sir," said he. "Now, gentlemen, you have heard the offer of Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool. It will give us a base to start from. Mr. Strellenhaus has offered twenty pounds a head."

"Guineas," said Holloway.

"Bravo, Mr. Holloway! I knew that you would take a hand. You are not the man to let

such a string of horses pass away from you. The bid is twenty guineas a head."

"Twenty-five pounds," said Mr. Strellenhaus.

"Twenty-six."

"Thirty."

It was London against Liverpool, and it was the head of the trade against an outsider. Still, the one man had increased his bids by fives and the other only by ones. Those fives meant determination and also wealth. Holloway had ruled the market so long that the crowd was delighted at finding some one who would stand up to him.

"The bid now stands at thirty pounds a head," said the salesman. "The word lies with you, Mr. Holloway."

The London dealer was glancing keenly at his unknown opponent, and he was asking himself whether this was a genuine rival, or whether it was a device of some sort—an agent of Flynn's, perhaps—for running up the price. Little Mr. Strellenhaus, the same apple-faced gentleman whom Dodds had noticed in the coffee-room, stood looking at the horses with the sharp, quick glances of a man who knows what he is looking for.

"Thirty-one," said Holloway, with the air of a man who has gone to his extreme limit.

"Thirty-two," said Strellenhaus, promptly.

Holloway grew angry at this persistent opposition. His red face flushed redder still.

"Thirty-three!" he shouted.

"Thirty-four," said Strellenhaus.

Holloway became thoughtful, and entered a few figures in his note-book. There were seventy horses. He knew that Flynn's stock was always of the highest quality. With the hunting season

coming on he might rely upon selling them at an average of from forty-five to fifty. Some of them might carry a heavy weight and would run to three figures. On the other hand, there was the feed and keep of them for three months, the danger of the voyage, the chance of influenza or some of those other complaints which run through an entire stable as measles go through a nursery. Deducting all this, it was a question whether at the present price any profit would be left upon the transaction. Every pound that he bid meant seventy out of his pocket. And yet he could not submit to be beaten by this stranger without a struggle. As a business matter it was important to him to be recognised as the head of his profession. He would make one more effort if he sacrificed his profit by doing so.

"At the end of your rope, Mr. Holloway?" asked the salesman, with the suspicion of a sneer.

"Thirty-five," cried Holloway, gruffly.

"Thirty-six," said Strellenhaus.

"Then I wish you joy of your bargain," said Holloway. "I don't buy at that price, but I should be glad to sell you some."

Mr. Strellenhaus took no notice of the irony. He was still looking critically at the horses. The salesman glanced round him in a perfunctory way.

"Thirty-six pounds bid," said he. "Mr. Jack Flynn's lot is going to Mr. Strellenhaus of Liverpool, at thirty-six pounds a head. Going—going——"

"Forty!" cried a high, thin, clear voice.

A buzz rose from the crowd, and they were all on tiptoe again, trying to catch a glimpse of this reckless buyer. Being a tall man, Dodds could see

over the others, and there at the side of Holloway he saw the masterful nose and aristocratic beard of the second stranger in the coffee-room. A sudden personal interest added itself to the scene. He felt that he was on the verge of something—something dimly seen—which he could himself turn to account. The two men with strange names, the telegrams, the horses—what was underlying it all?

The salesman was all animation again, and Mr. Jack Flynn was sitting up with his white whiskers bristling and his eyes twinkling. It was the best deal which he had ever made in his fifty years of experience.

"What name, sir?" asked the salesman.

"Mr. Mancune."

"Address?"

"Mr. Mancune of Glasgow."

"Thank you for your bid, sir. Forty pounds a head has been bid by Mr. Mancune of Glasgow. Any advance upon forty?"

"Forty-one," said Strellenhaus.

"Forty-five," said Mancune.

The tactics had changed, and it was the turn of Strellenhaus now to advance by ones, while his rival sprang up by fives. But the former was as dogged as ever.

"Forty-six," said he.

"Fifty!" cried Mancune.

It was unheard of. The most that the horses could possibly average at a retail price was as much as these men were willing to pay wholesale.

"Two lunatics from Bedlam," whispered the angry Holloway. "If I was Flynn I would see

the colour of their money before I went any further."

The same thought had occurred to the salesman.

"As a mere matter of business, gentlemen," said he, "it is usual in such cases to put down a small deposit as a guarantee of *bona fides*. You will understand how I am placed, and that I have not had the pleasure of doing business with either of you before."

"How much?" asked Strellenhaus, briefly.

"Should we say five hundred?"

"Here is a note for a thousand pounds."

"And here is another," said Mancune.

"Nothing could be more handsome, gentlemen," said the salesman. "It's a treat to see such a spirited competition. The last bid was fifty pounds a head from Mancune. The word lies with you, Mr. Strellenhaus."

Mr. Jack Flynn whispered something to the salesman.

"Quite so! Mr. Flynn suggests, gentlemen, that as you are both large buyers, it would, perhaps, be a convenience to you if he was to add the string of Mr. Tom Flynn, which consists of seventy animals of precisely the same quality, making one hundred and forty in all. Have you any objection, Mr. Mancune?"

"No, sir."

"And you, Mr. Strellenhaus?"

"I should prefer it."

"Very handsome! Very handsome indeed!" murmured the salesman. "Then I understand, Mr. Mancune, that your offer of fifty pounds a head extends to the whole of these horses?"

"Yes, sir."

A long breath went up from the crowd. Seven thousand pounds at one deal. It was a record for Dunsloe.

"Any advance, Mr. Strellenhaus?"

"Fifty-one."

"Fifty-five."

"Fifty-six."

"Sixty."

They could hardly believe their ears. Holloway stood with his mouth open, staring blankly in front of him. The salesman tried hard to look as if such bidding and such prices were nothing unusual. Jack Flynn of Kildare smiled benignly and rubbed his hands together. The crowd listened in dead silence.

"Sixty-one," said Strellenhaus. From the beginning he had stood without a trace of emotion upon his round face, like a little automatic figure which bid by clockwork. His rival was of a more excitable nature. His eyes were shining, and he was for ever twitching at his beard.

"Sixty-five," he cried.

"Sixty-six."

"Seventy."

But the clockwork had run down. No answering bid came from Mr. Strellenhaus.

"Seventy bid, sir."

Mr. Strellenhaus shrugged his shoulders.

"I am buying for another, and I have reached his limit," said he. "If you will permit me to send for instructions——"

"I am afraid, sir, that the sale must proceed."

"Then the horses belong to this gentleman." For the first time he turned toward his rival, and

their glances crossed like sword-blades. "It is possible that I may see the horses again."

"I hope so," said Mr. Mancune; and his white, waxed moustache gave a feline upward bristle.

So, with a bow, they separated. Mr. Strellenhaus walked down to the telegraph-office, where his message was delayed because Mr. Worlington Dodds was already at the end of the wires, for, after dim guesses and vague conjecture, he had suddenly caught a clear view of this coming event which had cast so curious a shadow before it in this little Irish town. Political rumours, names, appearances, telegrams, seasoned horses at any price, there could only be one meaning to it. He held a secret, and he meant to use it.

Mr. Warner, who was the partner of Mr. Worlington Dodds, and who was suffering from the same eclipse, had gone down to the Stock Exchange, but had found little consolation there, for the European system was in a ferment, and rumours of peace and of war were succeeding each other with such rapidity and assurance that it was impossible to know which to trust. It was obvious that a fortune lay either way, for every rumour set the funds fluctuating; but without special information it was impossible to act, and no one dared to plunge heavily upon the strength of newspaper surmise and the gossip of the street. Warner knew that an hour's work might resuscitate the fallen fortunes of himself and his partner, and yet he could not afford to make a mistake. He returned to his office in the afternoon, half inclined to back the chances of peace, for of all war-scares not one in ten comes to pass. As he entered the office a telegram lay upon the table. It was from

Dunsloe, a place of which he had never heard, and was signed by his absent partner. The message was in cipher, but he soon translated it, for it was short and crisp.

"I am a bear of everything German and French. Sell, sell, sell, keep on selling."

For a moment Warner hesitated. What could Worlington Dodds know at Dunsloe which was not known in Throgmorton Street? But he remembered the quickness and decision of his partner. He would not have sent such a message without very good grounds. If he was to act at all he must act at once, so, hardening his heart, he went down to the house, and, dealing upon that curious system by which a man can sell what he has not got, and what he could not pay for if he had it, he disposed of heavy parcels of French and German securities. He had caught the market in one of its little spasms of hope, and there was no lack of buying until his own persistent selling caused others to follow his lead, and so brought about a reaction. When Warner returned to his offices it took him some hours to work out his accounts, and he emerged into the streets in the evening with the absolute certainty that the next settling-day would leave him either hopelessly bankrupt or exceedingly prosperous.

It all depended upon Worlington Dodds's information. What could he possibly have found out at Dunsloe?

And then suddenly he saw a newspaper-boy fasten a poster upon a lamp-post, and a little crowd had gathered round it in an instant. One of them waved his hat in the air; another shouted to a friend across the street. Warner hurried up and

caught a glimpse of the poster between two craning heads—

"FRANCE DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY."

"By Jove!" cried Warner. "Old Dodds was right, after all."

THE KING OF THE FOXES

It was after a hunting dinner, and there were as many scarlet coats as black ones round the table. The conversation over the cigars had turned, therefore, in the direction of horses and horsemen, with reminiscences of phenomenal runs where foxes had led the pack from end to end of a county, and been overtaken at last by two or three limping hounds and a huntsman on foot, while every rider in the field had been pounded. As the port circulated the runs became longer and more apocryphal, until we had the whips inquiring their way and failing to understand the dialect of the people who answered them. The foxes, too, became more eccentric, and we had foxes up pollard willows, foxes which were dragged by the tail out of horses' mangers, and foxes which had raced through an open front door and gone to ground in a lady's bonnet-box. The master had told one or two tall reminiscences, and when he cleared his throat for another we were all curious, for he was a bit of an artist in his way and produced his effects in a *crescendo* fashion. His face wore the earnest, practical, severely accurate expression which heralded some of his finest efforts.

"It was before I was master," said he. "Sir Charles Adair had the hounds at that time, and then afterward they passed to old Lathom, and then to me. It may possibly have been just after Lathom took them over, but my strong impression is that it was in Adair's time. That would be early in the seventies—about seventy-two, I should say.

"The man I mean has moved to another part of the country, but I dare say that some of you can remember him. Danbury was the name—Walter Danbury, or Wat Danbury, as the people used to call him. He was the son of old Joe Danbury, of High Ascombe, and when his father died he came into a very good thing, for his only brother was drowned when the *Magna Charta* foundered, so he inherited the whole estate. It was but a few hundred acres, but it was good arable land, and those were the great days of farming. Besides, it was freehold, and a yeoman farmer without a mortgage was a warmish man before the great fall in wheat came. Foreign wheat and barbed wire—those are the two curses of this country, for the one spoils the farmer's work and the other spoils his play.

"This young Wat Danbury was a very fine fellow, a keen rider, and thorough sportsman, but his head was a little turned at having come, when so young, into a comfortable fortune, and he went the pace for a year or two. The lad had no vice in him, but there was a hard-drinking set in the neighbourhood at that time, and Danbury got drawn in among them; and, being an amiable fellow who liked to do what his friends were doing, he very soon took to drinking a great deal more than was good for him. As a rule, a man who takes his exercise may drink as much as he likes in the evening, and do himself no very great harm, if he will leave it alone during the day. Danbury had too many friends for that, however, and it really looked as if the poor chap was going to the bad, when a very curious thing happened which pulled him up with such a sudden jerk that he

never put his hand upon the neck of a whiskey bottle again.

"He had a peculiarity which I have noticed in a good many other men, that though he was always playing tricks with his own health, he was none the less very anxious about it, and was extremely fidgety if ever he had any trivial symptom. Being a tough, open-air fellow, who was always as hard as a nail, it was seldom that there was anything amiss with him; but at last the drink began to tell, and he woke one morning with his hands shaking and all his nerves tingling like overstretched fiddle-strings. He had been dining at some very wet house the night before, and the wine had, perhaps, been more plentiful than choice; at any rate, there he was, with a tongue like a bath-towel and a head that ticked like an eight-day clock. He was very alarmed at his own condition, and he sent for Dr. Middleton, of Ascombe, the father of the man who practises there now.

"Middleton had been a great friend of old Danbury's, and he was very sorry to see his son going to the devil; so he improved the occasion by taking his case very seriously, and lecturing him upon the danger of his ways. He shook his head and talked about the possibility of *delirium tremens*, or even of mania, if he continued to lead such a life. Wat Danbury was horribly frightened.

"'Do you think I am going to get anything of the sort?' he wailed.

"'Well, really, I don't know,' said the doctor, gravely. 'I cannot undertake to say that you are out of danger. Your system is very much out of order. At any time during the day you might have those grave symptoms of which I warn you.'

"'You think I shall be safe by evening?'

"'If you drink nothing during the day, and have no nervous symptoms before evening, I think you may consider yourself safe,' the doctor answered. A little fright would, he thought, do his patient good, so he made the most of the matter.

"'What symptoms may I expect?' asked Danbury.

"'It generally takes the form of optical delusions.'

"'I see specks floating all about.'

"'That is mere biliousness,' said the doctor soothingly, for he saw that the lad was highly strung and he did not wish to overdo it. 'I dare say that you will have no symptoms of the kind, but when they do come they usually take the shape of insects, or reptiles, or curious animals.'

"'And if I see anything of the kind?'

"'If you do, you will at once send for me;' and so, with a promise of medicine, the doctor departed.

"Young Wat Danbury rose and dressed and moped about the room feeling very miserable and unstrung, with a vision of the County Asylum for ever in his mind. He had the doctor's word for it that if he could get through to evening in safety he would be all right; but it is not very exhilarating to be waiting for symptoms, and to keep on glancing at your bootjack to see whether it is still a bootjack or whether it has begun to develop antennæ and legs. At last he could stand it no longer, and an overpowering longing for the fresh air and the green grass came over him. Why should he stay indoors when the Ascombe Hunt was meeting within half a mile of him? If he was going to

have these delusions which the doctor talked of, he would not have them the sooner nor the worse because he was on horseback in the open. He was sure, too, it would ease his aching head. And so it came about that in ten minutes he was in his hunting-kit, and in ten more he was riding out of his stable-yard with his roan mare Matilda between his knees. He was a little unsteady in his saddle just at first, but the further he went the better he felt, until by the time he reached the meet his head was almost clear, and there was nothing troubling him except those haunting words of the doctor's about the possibility of delusions any time before nightfall.

"But soon he forgot that also, for as he came up the hounds were thrown off, and they drew the Gravel Hanger and afterward the Hickory Copse. It was just the morning for a scent—no wind to blow it away, no water to wash it out, and just damp enough to make it cling. There was a field of forty, all keen men and good riders, so when they came to the Black Hanger they knew that there would be some sport, for that's a cover which never draws blank. The woods were thicker in those days than now, and the foxes were thicker also, and that great dark oak-grove was swarming with them. The only difficulty was to make them break, for it is, as you know, a very close country, and you must coax them out into the open before you can hope for a run.

"When they came to the Black Hanger the field took their positions along the cover-side wherever they thought that they were most likely to get a good start. Some went in with the hounds, some clustered at the ends of the drives, and some

kept outside in the hope of the fox breaking in that direction. Young Wat Danbury knew the country like the palm of his hand, so he made for a place where several drives intersected, and there he waited. He had a feeling that the faster and the further he galloped the better he should be, and so he was chafing to be off. His mare, too, was in the height of fettle and one of the fastest goers in the county. Wat was a splendid light-weight rider—under ten stone with his saddle—and the mare was a powerful creature, all quarters and shoulders, fit to carry a lifeguardsman; and so it was no wonder that there was hardly a man in the field who could hope to stay with him. There he waited and listened to the shouting of the huntsman and the whips, catching a glimpse now and then in the darkness of the wood of a whisking tail, or the gleam of a white-and-tan side amongst the underwood. It was a well-trained pack, and there was not so much as a whine to tell you that forty hounds were working all round you.

"And then suddenly there came one long-drawn yell from one of them, and it was taken up by another, and another, until within a few seconds the whole pack was giving tongue together and running on a hot scent. Danbury saw them stream across one of the drives and disappear upon the other side, and an instant later the three red coats of the hunt-servants flashed after them upon the same line. He might have made a shorter cut down one of the other drives, but he was afraid of heading the fox, so he followed the lead of the huntsman. Right through the wood they went in a bee-line, galloping with their faces brushed by their horses' manes as they stooped under the

branches. It's ugly going, as you know, with the roots all wriggling about in the darkness, but you can take a risk when you catch an occasional glimpse of the pack running with a breast-high scent; so in and out they dodged, until the wood began to thin at the edges, and they found themselves in the long bottom where the river runs. It is clear going there upon grassland, and the hounds were running very strong about two hundred yards ahead, keeping parallel with the stream. The field, who had come round the wood instead of going through, were coming hard over the fields upon the left; but Danbury, with the hunt-servants, had a clear lead, and they never lost it. Two of the field got on terms with them: Parson Geddes on a big seventeen-hand bay which he used to ride in those days, and Squire Foley, who rode as a feather-weight, and made his hunters out of cast thoroughbreds from the Newmarket sales; but the others never had a look-in from start to finish, for there was no check and no pulling, and it was clear cross-country racing from start to finish. If you had drawn a line right across the map with a pencil you couldn't go straighter than that fox ran, heading for the South Downs and the sea; and the hounds ran as surely as if they were running to view, and yet from the beginning no one ever saw the fox, and there was never a hallo forrard to tell them that he had been spied. This, however, is not so surprising, for if you've been over that line of country you will know that there are not very many people about.

"There were six of them then in the front row: Parson Geddes, Squire Foley, the huntsman, two whips, and Wat Danbury, who had forgotten all

about his head and the doctor by this time, and had not a thought for anything but the run. All six were galloping just as hard as they could lay hoofs to the ground. One of the whips dropped back, however, as some of the hounds were tailing off, and that brought them down to five. Then Foley's thoroughbred strained herself, as these slim-legged, dainty-fetlocked thoroughbreds will do when the going is rough, and he had to take a back seat. But the other four were still going strong, and they did four or five miles down the river flat at a rasping pace. It had been a wet winter, and the waters had been out a little time before, so there was a deal of sliding and splashing; but by the time they came to the bridge the whole field was out of sight, and these four had the hunt to themselves.

"The fox had crossed the bridge—for foxes do not care to swim a chilly river any more than humans do—and from that point he had streaked away southward as hard as he could tear. It is broken country, rolling heaths, down one slope and up another, and it's hard to say whether the up or the down is the more trying for the horses. This sort of switchback work is all right for a cobby, short-backed, short-legged little horse, but it is killing work for a big, long-striding hunter such as one wants in the Midlands. Anyhow, it was too much for Parson Geddes' seventeen-hand bay, and, though he tried the Irish trick—for he was a rare keen sportsman—of running up the hills by his horse's head, it was all to no use, and he had to give it up. So then there was only the huntsman, the whip, and Wat Danbury—all going strong.

"But the country got worse and worse, and the

hills were steeper and more thickly covered in heather and bracken. The horses were over their hocks all the time, and the place was pitted with rabbit-holes; but the hounds were still streaming along, and the riders could not afford to pick their steps. As they raced down one slope, the hounds were always flowing up the opposite one, until it looked like that game where the one figure in falling makes the other one rise. But never a glimpse did they get of the fox, although they knew very well that he must be only a very short way ahead for the scent to lie so strong. And then Wat Danbury heard a crash and a thud at his elbow, and looking round he saw a pair of white cords and top-boots kicking out of a tussock of brambles. The whip's horse had stumbled, and the whip was out of the running. Danbury and the huntsman eased down for an instant; and then, seeing the man staggering to his feet all right, they turned and settled into their saddles once more.

"Joe Clarke, the huntsman, was a famous old rider, known for five counties round; but he reckoned upon his second horse, and the second horses had all been left many miles behind. However, the one he was riding was good enough for anything with such a horseman upon his back, and he was going as well as when he started. As to Wat Danbury, he was going better. With every stride his own feelings improved, and the mind of the rider has its influence upon the mind of the horse. The stout little roan was gathering its muscular limbs under it and stretching to the gallop as if it were steel and whalebone instead of flesh and blood. Wat had never come to the end of its powers yet,

and to-day he had such a chance of testing them as he had never had before.

"There was a pasture country beyond the heather slopes, and for several miles the two riders were either losing ground as they fumbled with their crop-handles at the bars of gates, or gaining it again as they galloped over the fields. Those were the days before this accursed wire came into the country, and you could generally break a hedge where you could not fly it, so they did not trouble the gates more than they could help. Then they were down in a hard lane, where they had to slacken their pace, and through a farm where a man came shouting excitedly after them; but they had no time to stop and listen to him, for the hounds were on some ploughland, only two fields ahead. It was sloping upward, that ploughland, and the horses were over their fetlocks in the red, soft soil. When they reached the top they were blowing badly, but a grand valley sloped before them, leading up to the open country of the South Downs. Between, there lay a belt of pine-woods, into which the hounds were streaming, running now in a long, straggling line and shedding one here and one there as they ran. You could see the white-and-tan dots here and there where the limpers were tailing away. But half the pack were still going well, though the pace and distance had both been tremendous—two clear hours now without a check.

"There was a drive through the pinewood—one of those green, slightly-rutted drives where a horse can get the last yard out of itself, for the ground is hard enough to give him clean going and yet springy enough to help him. Wat Danbury got alongside of the huntsman and they galloped to-

gether with their stirrup-irons touching, and the hounds within a hundred yards of them.

"'We have it all to ourselves,' said he.

"'Yes, sir, we've shook off the lot of 'em this time,' said old Joe Clarke. 'If we get this fox it's worth while 'aving 'im skinned an' stuffed, for 'e's a curiosity 'e is.'

"'It's the fastest run I ever had in my life!' cried Danbury.

"'And the fastest that ever I 'ad, an' that means more,' said the old huntsman. 'But what licks me is that we've never 'ad a look at the beast. 'E must leave an amazin' scent be'ind 'im when these 'ounds can follow 'm like this, and yet none of us have seen 'im when we've 'ad a clear 'alf mile view in front of us.'

"'I expect we'll have a view of him presently,' said Danbury; and in his mind he added, 'at least, I shall,' for the huntsman's horse was gasping as it ran, and the white foam was pouring down it like the side of a washing-tub.

"They had followed the hounds on to one of the side tracks which led out of the main drive, and that divided into a smaller track still, where the branches switched across their faces as they went and there was barely room for one horse at a time. Wat Danbury took the lead, and he heard the huntsman's horse clumping along heavily behind him, while his own mare was going with less spring than when she had started. She answered to a touch of his crop or spur, however, and he felt that there was something still left to draw upon. And then he looked up, and there was a heavy wooden stile at the end of the narrow track, with a lane of stiff young saplings leading down to it which was

far too thick to break through. The hounds were running clear upon the grassland on the other side, and you were bound either to get over that stile or lose sight of them, for the pace was too hot to let you go round.

"Well, Wat Danbury was not the lad to flinch, and at it he went full split, like a man who means what he is doing. She rose gallantly to it, rapped it hard with her front hoof, shook him on to her withers, recovered herself, and was over. Wat had hardly got back into his saddle when there was a clatter behind him like the fall of a woodstack, and there was the top bar in splinters, the horse on its belly, and the huntsman on hands and knees half a dozen yards in front of him. Wat pulled up for an instant, for the fall was a smasher; but he saw old Joe spring to his feet and get to his horse's bridle. The horse staggered up, but the moment it put one foot in front of the other Wat saw that it was hopelessly lame—a slipped shoulder and a six-weeks' job. There was nothing he could do, and Joe was shouting to him not to lose the hounds, so off he went again, the one solitary survivor of the whole hunt. When a man finds himself there, he can retire from fox-hunting, for he has tasted the highest which it has to offer. I remember once when I was out with the Royal Surrey—but I'll tell you that story afterward.

"The pack, or what was left of them, had got a bit ahead during this time; but he had a clear view of them on the downland, and the mare seemed full of pride at being the only one left, for she was stepping out rarely and tossing her head as she went. There were two miles over the green shoulder of a hill, a rattle down a stony, deep-rutted country

lane, where the mare stumbled and nearly came down, a jump over a five-foot brook, a cut through a hazel copse, another dose of heavy ploughland, a couple of gates to open, and then the green, unbroken Downs beyond. 'Well,' said Wat Danbury to himself, 'I'll see this fox run into or I shall see it drowned, for it's all clear going now between this and the chalk cliffs which line the sea.'

"But he was wrong in that, as he speedily discovered. In all the little hollows of the Downs at that part there are plantations of fir-woods, some of which have grown to a good size. You do not see them until you come upon the edge of the valleys in which they lie. Danbury was galloping hard over the short, springy turf, when he came over the lip of one of these depressions, and there was the dark clump of wood lying in front of and beneath him. There were only a dozen hounds still running, and they were just disappearing among the trees. The sunlight was shining straight upon the long, olive-green slopes which curved down toward this wood, and Danbury, who had the eyes of a hawk, swept them over this great expanse; but there was nothing moving upon it. A few sheep were grazing far up on the right, but there was no other sight of any living creature. He was certain then that he was very near to the end, for either the fox must have gone to ground in the wood or the hounds' noses must be at his very brush. The mare seemed to know also what that great empty sweep of countryside meant, for she quickened her stride, and a few minutes afterward Danbury was galloping into the fir-wood.

"He had come from bright sunshine, but the wood was very closely planted, and so dim that he

could hardly see to right or to left out of the narrow path down which he was riding. You know what a solemn, churchyardy sort of place a fir-wood is. I suppose it is the absence of any undergrowth, and the fact that the trees never move at all. At any rate, a kind of chill suddenly struck Wat Danbury, and it flashed through his mind that there had been some very singular points about this run —its length and its straightness, and the fact that from the first find no one had ever caught a glimpse of the creature. Some silly talk which had been going round the country about the king of the foxes—a sort of demon fox, so fast that it could outrun any pack, and so fierce that they could do nothing with it if they overtook it—suddenly came back into his mind, and it did not seem so laughable now in the dim fir-wood as it had done when the story had been told over the wine and cigars. The nervousness which had been on him in the morning, and which he had hoped that he had shaken off, swept over him again in an overpowering wave. He had been so proud of being alone, and yet he would have given ten pounds now to have had Joe Clarke's homely face beside him. And then, just at that moment, there broke out from the thickest part of the wood the most frantic hullaballoo that ever he had heard in his life. The hounds had run into their fox.

"Well, you know, or you ought to know, what your duty is in such a case. You have to be whip, huntsman, and everything else if you are the first man up. You get in among the hounds, lash them off, and keep the brush and pads from being destroyed. Of course, Wat Danbury knew all about that, and he tried to force his mare through the

trees to the place where all this hideous screaming and howling came from, but the wood was so thick that it was impossible to ride it. He sprang off, therefore, left the mare standing, and broke his way through as best he could with his hunting-lash ready over his shoulder. But as he ran forward he felt his flesh go cold and creepy all over. He had heard hounds run into foxes many times before, but he had never heard such sounds as these. They were not the cries of triumph, but of fear. Every now and then came a shrill yelp of mortal agony. Holding his breath, he ran on until he broke through the interlacing branches and found himself in a little clearing with the hounds all crowding round a patch of tangled bramble at the further end.

"When he first caught sight of them the hounds were standing in a half-circle round this bramble-patch with their backs bristling and their jaws gaping. In front of the brambles lay one of them with his throat torn out, all crimson and white-and-tan. Wat came running out into the clearing, and at the sight of him the hounds took heart again, and one of them sprang with a growl into the bushes. At the same instant, a creature the size of a donkey jumped on to its feet, a huge grey head, with monstrous glistening fangs and tapering fox jaws, shot out from among the branches, and the hound was thrown several feet into the air, and fell howling among the cover. Then there was a clashing snap like a rat-trap closing, and the howls sharpened into a scream and then were still.

"Danbury had been on the look-out for symptoms all day, and now he had found them. He looked once more at the thicket, saw a pair of sav-

age red eyes fixed upon him, and fairly took to his heels. It might only be a passing delusion, or it might be the permanent mania of which the doctor had spoken, but, anyhow, the thing to do was to get back to bed and to quiet, and to hope for the best. He forgot the hounds, the hunt, and everything else in his desperate fears for his own reason. He sprang upon his mare, galloped her madly over the Downs, and only stopped when he found himself at a country station. There he left his mare at the inn, and made back for home as quickly as steam would take him. It was evening before he got there, shivering with apprehension and seeing those red eyes and savage teeth at every turn. He went straight to bed and sent for Dr. Middleton.

"'I've got 'em, doctor,' said he. 'It came about exactly as you said—strange creatures, optical delusions, and everything. All I ask you now is to save my reason.'

"The doctor listened to his story, and was shocked as he heard it.

"'It appears to be a very clear case,' said he. 'This must be a lesson to you for life.'

"'Never a drop again if I only come safely through this,' cried Wat Danbury.

"'Well, my dear boy, if you will stick to that it may prove a blessing in disguise. But the difficulty in this case is to know where fact ends and fancy begins. You see, it is not as if there was only one delusion. There have been several. The dead dogs, for example, must have been one as well as the creature in the bush.'

"'I saw it all as clearly as I see you.'

"'One of the characteristics of this form of delirium is that what you see is even clearer than

reality. I was wondering whether the whole run was not a delusion also.'

"Wat Danbury pointed to his hunting-boots still lying upon the floor, flecked with the splashings of two counties.

"'Hum! that looks very real, certainly. No doubt, in your weak state, you over-exerted yourself and so brought this attack upon yourself. Well, whatever the cause, our treatment is clear. You will take the soothing mixture which I will send to you, and we shall put two leeches upon your temples to-night to relieve any congestion of the brain.'

"So Wat Danbury spent the night in tossing about and reflecting what a sensitive thing this machinery of ours is, and how very foolish it is to play tricks with what is so easily put out of gear and so difficult to mend. And so he repeated and repeated his oath that this first lesson should be his last, and that from that time forward he would be a sober, hard-working yeoman as his father had been before him. So he lay, tossing and still repentant, when his door flew open in the morning and in rushed the doctor with a newspaper crumpled up in his hand.

"'My dear boy,' he cried. 'I owe you a thousand apologies. You're the most ill-used lad and I the greatest numskull in the county. Listen to this!' And he sat down upon the side of the bed, flattened out his paper upon his knee, and began to read.

"The paragraph was headed, 'Disaster to the Ascombe Hounds,' and it went on to say that four of the hounds, shockingly torn and mangled, had been found in Winton Fir Wood upon the South

Downs. The run had been so severe that half the pack were lamed; but the four found in the wood were actually dead, although the cause of their extraordinary injuries was still unknown. 'So you see,' said the doctor, looking up, 'that I was wrong when I put the dead hounds among the delusions.'

"'But the cause?' cried Watt.

"'Well, I think we may guess the cause from an item which has been inserted just as the paper went to press. "Late last night, Mr. Brown, of Smither's Farm, to the east of Hastings, perceived what he imagined to be an enormous dog worrying one of his sheep. He shot the creature, which proves to be a grey Siberian wolf of the variety known as *Lupus Giganticus*. It is supposed to have escaped from some travelling menagerie."'

"That's the story, gentlemen, and Wat Danbury stuck to his good resolutions, for the fright which he had, cured him of all wish to run such a risk again; and he never touches anything stronger than lime-juice—at least, he hadn't before he left this part of the country, five years ago next Lady Day."

THE THREE CORRESPONDENTS

THERE was only the one little feathery clump of dôm palms in all that great wilderness of black rocks and orange sand. It stood high on the bank, and below it the brown Nile swirled swiftly toward the Ambigole Cataract, fitting a little frill of foam round each of the boulders which studded its surface. Above, out of a naked blue sky, the sun was beating down upon the sand, and up again from the sand under the brims of the pith-hats of the horsemen with the scorching glare of a blast-furnace. It had risen so high that the shadows of the horses were no larger than themselves.

"Whew!" cried Mortimer, mopping his forehead, "you'd pay five shillings for this at the hummums."

"Precisely," said Scott. "But you are not asked to ride twenty miles in a Turkish bath with a field-glass and a revolver, and a water-bottle and a whole Christmas-treeful of things dangling from you. The hot-house at Kew is excellent as a conservatory, but not adapted for exhibitions upon the horizontal bar. I vote for a camp in the palm-grove and a halt until evening."

Mortimer rose on his stirrups and looked hard to the southward. Everywhere were the same black burned rocks and deep orange sand. At one spot only an intermittent line appeared to have been cut through the rugged spurs which ran down to

the river. It was the bed of the old railway, long destroyed by the Arabs, but now in process of reconstruction by the advancing Egyptians. There was no other sign of man's handiwork in all that desolate scene.

"It's palm trees or nothing," said Scott.

"Well, I suppose we must; and yet I grudge every hour until we catch the force up. What *would* our editors say if we were late for the action?"

"My dear chap, an old bird like you doesn't need to be told that no sane modern general would ever attack until the Press is up."

"You don't mean that," said young Anerley. "I thought we were looked upon as an unmitigated nuisance."

"'Newspaper correspondents and travelling gentlemen, and all that tribe of useless drones'—being an extract from Lord Wolseley's 'Soldiers' Pocket-Book,'" cried Scott. "We know all about *that*, Anerley;" and he winked behind his blue spectacles. "If there was going to be a battle we should very soon have an escort of cavalry to hurry us up. I've been in fifteen, and I never saw one where they had not arranged for a reporter's table."

"That's very well; but the enemy may be less considerate," said Mortimer.

"They are not strong enough to force a battle."

"A skirmish, then?"

"Much more likely to be a raid upon the rear. In that case we are just where we should be."

"So we are! What a score over Reuter's man up with the advance! Well, we'll outspan and have our tiffin under the palms."

THE THREE CORRESPONDENTS

There were three of them, and they stood for three great London dailies. Reuter's was thirty miles ahead; two evening pennies upon camels were twenty miles behind. And among them they represented the eyes and ears of the public—the great silent millions and millions who had paid for everything, and who waited so patiently to know the result of their outlay.

They were remarkable men these body-servants of the Press; two of them already veterans in camps, the other setting out upon his first campaign, and full of deference for his famous comrades.

This first one, who had just dismounted from his bay polo-pony, was Mortimer, of the *Intelligence*—tall, straight, and hawk-faced, with kharki tunic and riding-breeches, drab putties, a scarlet cummerbund, and a skin tanned to the red of a Scotch fir by sun and wind, and mottled by the mosquito and the sand-fly. The other—small, quick, mercurial, with blue-black, curling beard and hair, a fly-switch for ever flicking in his left hand—was Scott, of the *Courier*, who had come through more dangers and brought off more brilliant *coups* than any man in the profession, save the eminent Chandler, now no longer in a condition to take the field. They were a singular contrast, Mortimer and Scott, and it was in their differences that the secret of their close friendship lay. Each dovetailed into the other. The strength of each was in the other's weakness. Together they formed a perfect unit. Mortimer was Saxon—slow, conscientious, and deliberate; Scott was Celtic—quick, happy-go-lucky, and brilliant. Mortimer was the more solid, Scott the more attractive. Mortimer was the deeper thinker, Scott

the brighter talker. By a curious coincidence, though each had seen much of warfare, their campaigns had never coincided. Together they covered all recent military history. Scott had done Plevna, the Shipka, the Zulus, Egypt, Suakim; Mortimer had seen the Boer War, the Chilian, the Bulgaria and Servian, the Gordon relief, the Indian frontier, Brazilian rebellion, and Madagascar. This intimate personal knowledge gave a peculiar flavour to their talk. There was none of the second-hand surmise and conjecture which form so much of our conversation; it was all concrete and final. The speaker had been there, had seen it, and there was an end of it.

In spite of their friendship there was the keenest professional rivalry between the two men. Either would have sacrificed himself to help his companion, but either would also have sacrificed his companion to help his paper. Never did a jockey yearn for a winning mount as keenly as each of them longed to have a full column in a morning edition whilst every other daily was blank. They were perfectly frank about the matter. Each professed himself ready to steal a march on his neighbour, and each recognised that the other's duty to his employer was far higher than any personal consideration.

The third man was Anerley, of the *Gazette*—young, inexperienced, and rather simple-looking. He had a droop of the lip which some of his more intimate friends regarded as a libel upon his character, and his eyes were so slow and so sleepy that they suggested an affectation. A leaning toward soldiering had sent him twice to autumn manœuvres, and a touch of colour in his descriptions had induced the proprietors of the *Gazette* to give him a

trial as a war-special. There was a pleasing diffidence about his bearing which recommended him to his experienced companions, and if they had a smile sometimes at his guileless ways, it was soothing to them to have a comrade from whom nothing was to be feared. From the day that they left the telegraph-wire behind them at Sarras, the man who was mounted upon a fifteen-guinea thirteen-four Syrian was delivered over into the hands of the owners of the two fastest polo-ponies that ever shot down the Ghezireh ground.

The three had dismounted and led their beasts under the welcome shade. In the brassy, yellow glare every branch above threw so black and solid a shadow that the men involuntarily raised their feet to step over them.

"The palm makes an excellent hat-rack," said Scott, slinging his revolver and his water-bottle over the little upward-pointing pegs which bristle from the trunk. "As a shade-tree, however, it isn't an unqualified success. Curious that in the universal adaptation of means to ends something a little less flimsy could not have been devised for the tropics."

"Like the banyan in India."

"Or the fine hardwood trees in Ashantee, where a whole regiment could picnic under the shade."

"The teak tree isn't bad in Burmah, either. By Jove, the baccy has all come loose in the saddle-bag! That long-cut mixture smokes rather hot for this climate. How about the baggles, Anerley?"

"They'll be here in five minutes."

Down the winding path which curved among the rocks the little train of baggage camels was daintily picking its way. They came mincing and

undulating along, turning their heads slowly from side to side with the air of a self-conscious woman. In front rode the three Berberee body-servants upon donkeys, and behind walked the Arab camel-boys. They had been travelling for nine long hours, ever since the first rising of the moon, at the weary camel-drag of two and a half miles an hour, but now they brightened, both beasts and men, at the sight of the grove and the riderless horses. In a few minutes the loads were unstrapped, the animals tethered, a fire lighted, fresh water carried up from the river, and each camel provided with his own little heap of tibbin laid in the centre of the tablecloth, without which no well-bred Arabian will condescend to feed. The dazzling light without, the subdued half-tones within, the green palm-fronds outlined against the deep blue sky, the flitting, silent-footed Arab servants, the crackling of sticks, the reek of a lighting fire, the placid, supercilious heads of the camels, they all come back in their dreams to those who have known them.

Scott was breaking eggs into a pan and rolling out a love-song in his rich, deep voice. Anerley, with his head and arms buried in a deal packing-case, was working his way through strata of tinned soups, bully beef, potted chicken and sardines to reach the jams which lay beneath. The conscientious Mortimer, with his notebook upon his knee, was jotting down what the railway engineer had told him at the line-end the day before. Suddenly he raised his eyes and saw the man himself on his chestnut pony, dipping and rising over the broken ground.

"Hullo! here's Merryweather!"

"A pretty lather his pony is in! He's had her

at that hand-gallop for hours, by the look of her. Hullo, Merryweather, hullo!"

The engineer, a small, compact man with a pointed red beard, had made as though he would ride past their camp without word or halt. Now he swerved, and easing his pony down to a canter, he headed her toward them.

"For God's sake, a drink!" he croaked. "My tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth."

Mortimer ran with the water-bottle, Scott with the whisky-flask, and Anerley with the tin pannikin. The engineer drank until his breath failed him.

"Well, I must be off," said he, striking the drops from his red moustache.

"Any news?"

"A hitch in the railway construction. I must see the General. It's the devil not having a telegraph."

"Anything we can report?" Out came three notebooks.

"I'll tell you after I've seen the General."

"Any dervishes?"

"The usual shaves. Hud-up, Jinny! Good-bye."

With a soft thudding upon the sand and a clatter among the stones the weary pony was off upon her journey once more.

"Nothing serious, I suppose?" said Mortimer, staring after him.

"Deuced serious," cried Scott. "The ham and eggs are burned! No—it's all right—saved, and done to a turn! Pull the box up, Anerley. Come on, Mortimer, stow that notebook! The fork is mightier than the pen just at present. What's the matter with you, Anerley?"

"I was wondering whether what we have just seen was worth a telegram."

"Well, it's for the proprietors to say if it's worth it. Sordid money considerations are not for us. We must wire about something just to justify our kharki coats and our putties."

"But what is there to say?"

Mortimer's long, austere face broke into a smile over the youngster's innocence. "It's not quite usual in our profession to give each other tips," said he. "However, as my telegram is written, I've no objection to your reading it. You may be sure that I would not show it to you if it were of the slightest importance."

Anerley took up the slip of paper and read—

"Merryweather obstacles stop journey confer General stop nature difficulties later stop rumours dervishes."

"This is very condensed," said Anerley, with wrinkled brows.

"Condensed!" cried Scott. "Why, it's sinfully garrulous. If my old man got a wire like that his language would crack the lamp-shades. I'd cut out half this; for example, I'd have out 'journey,' and 'nature,' and 'rumours.' But my old man would make a ten-line paragraph of it for all that."

"How?"

"Well, I'll do it myself just to show you. Lend me that stylo." He scribbled for a minute in his notebook. "It works out somewhat on these lines—

"'Mr. Charles H. Merryweather, the eminent railway engineer, who is at present engaged in superintending the construction of the line from Sarras to the front, has met with considerable ob-

stacles to the rapid completion of his important task'—of course the old man knows who Merryweather is, and what he is about, so the word 'obstacles' would suggest all that to him. 'He has to-day been compelled to make a journey of forty miles to the front in order to confer with the General upon the steps which are necessary in order to facilitate the work. Further particulars of the exact nature of the difficulties met with will be made public at a later date. All is quiet upon the line of communications, though the usual persistent rumours of the presence of dervishes in the Eastern desert continue to circulate.—*Our own Correspondent.*'

"How's that?" cried Scott, triumphantly, and his white teeth gleamed suddenly through his black beard. "That's the sort of flapdoodle for the dear old public."

"Will it interest them?"

"Oh, everything interests them. They want to know all about it; and they like to think that there is a man who is getting a hundred a month simply in order to tell it to them."

"It's very kind of you to teach me all this."

"Well, it is a little unconventional, for, after all, we are here to score over each other if we can. There are no more eggs, and you must take it out in jam. Of course, as Mortimer says, such a telegram as this is of no importance one way or another, except to prove to the office that we *are* in the Soudan and not at Monte Carlo. But when it comes to serious work it must be every man for himself."

"Is that quite necessary?"

"Why, of course it is."

"I should have thought if three men were to combine and to share their news, they would do better than if they were each to act for himself; and they would have a much pleasanter time of it."

The two older men sat with their bread-and-jam in their hands, and an expression of genuine disgust upon their faces.

"We are not here to have a pleasant time," said Mortimer, with a flash through his glasses. "We are here to do our best for our papers. How can they score over each other if we do not do the same? If we all combine we might as well amalgamate with Reuter at once."

"Why, it would take away the whole glory of the profession!" cried Scott. "At present the smartest man gets his stuff first on the wires. What inducement is there to be smart if we all share and share alike?"

"And at present the man with the best equipment has the best chance," remarked Mortimer, glancing across at the shot-silk polo ponies and the cheap little Syrian grey. "That is the fair reward of foresight and enterprise. Every man for himself, and let the best man win."

"That's the way to find who the best man is. Look at Chandler. He would never have got his chance if he had not played always off his own bat. You've heard how he pretended to break his leg, sent his fellow-correspondent off for the doctor, and so got a fair start for the telegraph office."

"Do you mean to say that was legitimate?"

"Everything is legitimate. It's your wits against my wits."

"I should call it dishonourable."

"You may call it what you like. Chandler's paper got the battle and the others didn't. It made Chandler's name."

"Or take Westlake," said Mortimer, cramming the tobacco into his pipe. "Hi, Abdul, you may have the dishes! Westlake brought his stuff down by pretending to be the Government courier, and using the relays of Government horses. Westlake's paper sold half a million."

"Is that legitimate also?" asked Anerley, thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Well, it looks a little like horse-stealing and lying."

"Well, *I* think I should do a little horse-stealing and lying if I could have a column to myself in a London daily. What do you say, Scott?"

"Anything short of manslaughter."

"And I'm not sure that I'd trust you there."

"Well, I don't think I should be guilty of newspaper-man-slaughter. That I regard as a distinct breach of professional etiquette. But if any outsider comes between a highly-charged correspondent and an electric wire, he does it at his peril. My dear Anerley, I tell you frankly that if you are going to handicap yourself with scruples you may just as well be in Fleet Street as in the Soudan. Our life is irregular. Our work has never been systematised. No doubt it will be some day, but the time is not yet. Do what you can and how you can, and be first on the wires; that's my advice to you; and also, that when next you come upon a campaign you bring with you the best horse that money can buy. Mortimer may beat me or I may beat Mortimer, but at least

we know that between us we have the fastest ponies in the country. We have neglected no chance."

"I am not so certain of that," said Mortimer, slowly. "You are aware, of course, that though a horse beats a camel on twenty miles, a camel beats a horse on thirty."

"What, one of those camels?" cried Anerley in astonishment.

The two seniors burst out laughing.

"No, no, the real high-bred trotter—the kind of beast the dervishes ride when they make their lightning raids."

"Faster than a galloping horse?"

"Well, it tires a horse down. It goes the same gait all the way, and it wants neither halt nor drink, and it takes rough ground much better than a horse. They used to have long-distance races at Halfa, and the camel always won at thirty."

"Still, we need not reproach ourselves, Scott, for we are not very likely to have to carry a thirty-mile message. They will have the field telegraph next week."

"Quite so. But at the present moment——"

"I know, my dear chap; but there is no motion of urgency before the house. Load baggles at five o'clock; so you have just three hours clear. Any sign of the evening pennies?"

Mortimer swept the northern horizon with his binoculars.

"Not in sight yet."

"They are quite capable of travelling during the heat of the day. Just the sort of thing evening pennies *would* do. Take care of your match, Anerley. These palm groves go up like a powder

magazine if you set them alight. Bye-bye." The two men crawled under their mosquito-nets and sank instantly into the easy sleep of those whose lives are spent in the open.

Young Anerley stood with his back against a palm tree and his briar between his lips, thinking over the advice which he had received. After all, they were the heads of the profession, these men, and it was not for him, the newcomer, to reform their methods. If they served their papers in this fashion, then he must do the same. They had at least been frank and generous in teaching him the rules of the game. If it was good enough for them it was good enough for him.

It was a broiling afternoon, and those thin frills of foam round the black, glistening necks of the Nile boulders looked delightfully cool and alluring. But it would not be safe to bathe for some hours to come. The air shimmered and vibrated over the baking stretch of sand and rock. There was not a breath of wind, and the droning and piping of the insects inclined one for sleep. Somewhere above a hoopoe was calling. Anerley knocked out his ashes, and was turning toward his couch, when his eye caught something moving in the desert to the south.

It was a horseman riding toward them as swiftly as the broken ground would permit. A messenger from the army, thought Anerley; and then, as he watched, the sun suddenly struck the man on the side of the head, and his chin flamed into gold. There could not be two horsemen with beards of such a colour. It was Merryweather, the engineer, and he was returning. What on earth was he returning for? He had been so keen to

see the General, and yet he was coming back with his mission unaccomplished. Was it that his pony was hopelessly foundered? It seemed to be moving well. Anerley picked up Mortimer's binoculars, and a foam-spattered horse and a weary koorbash-cracking man came cantering up the centre of the field. But there was nothing in his appearance to explain the mystery of his return.

Then as he watched them they dipped down into a hollow and disappeared. He could see that it was one of those narrow khors which led to the river, and he waited, glass in hand, for their immediate reappearance. But minute passed after minute and there was no sign of them. That narrow gully appeared to have swallowed them up. And then with a curious gulp and start he saw a little grey cloud wreathe itself slowly from among the rocks and drift in a long, hazy shred over the desert. In an instant he had torn Scott and Mortimer from their slumbers.

"Get up, you chaps!" he cried. "I believe Merryweather has been shot by dervishes."

"And Reuter not here!" cried the two veterans, exultantly clutching at their notebooks. "Merryweather shot! Where? When? How?"

In a few words Anerley explained what he had seen.

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Well, a shot loses itself very easily among rocks. By George, look at the buzzards!"

Two large brown birds were soaring in the deep blue heaven. As Scott spoke they circled down and dropped into the little khor.

"That's good enough," said Mortimer, with his

nose between the leaves of his book. "'Merryweather headed dervishes stop returned stop shot mutilated stop raid communications.' How's that?"

"You think he was headed off?"

"Why else should he return?"

"In that case, if they were out in front of him and others cut him off, there must be several small raiding-parties."

"I should judge so."

"How about the 'mutilated'?"

"I've fought against Arabs before."

"Where are you off to?"

"Sarras."

"I think I'll race you in," said Scott.

Anerley stared in astonishment at the absolutely impersonal way in which these men regarded the situation. In their zeal for news it had apparently never struck them that they, their camp and their servants, were all in the lion's mouth. But even as they talked there came the harsh, importunate rat-tat-tat of an irregular volley from among the rocks, and the high, keening whistle of bullets over their heads. A palm spray fluttered down amongst them. At the same instant the six frightened servants came running wildly in for protection.

It was the cool-headed Mortimer who organised the defence, for Scott's Celtic soul was so aflame at all this "copy" in hand and more to come, that he was too exuberantly boisterous for a commander. The other, with his spectacles and his stern face, soon had the servants in hand.

"*Tali henna! Egri!* What the deuce are you frightened about? Put the camels between the palm trunks. That's right. Now get the knee-tethers on them. *Quies!* Did you never hear bul-

lets before? Now put the donkeys here. Not much—you don't get my polo-pony to make a zareba with. Picket the ponies between the grove and the river out of danger's way. These fellows seem to fire even higher than they did in '85."

"That's got home, anyhow," said Scott, as they heard a soft, splashing thud like a stone in a mud-bank.

"Who's hit, then?"

"The brown camel that's chewing the cud."

As he spoke the creature, its jaw still working, laid its long neck along the ground and closed its large dark eyes.

"That shot cost me fifteen pounds," said Mortimer, ruefully. "How many of them do you make?"

"Four, I think."

"Only four Bezingers, at any rate; there may be some spearmen."

"I think not; it is a little raiding-party of riflemen. By the way, Anerley, you've never been under fire before, have you?"

"Never," said the young pressman, who was conscious of a curious feeling of nervous elation.

"Love and poverty and war, they are all experiences necessary to make a complete life. Pass over those cartridges. This is a very mild baptism that you are undergoing, for behind these camels you are as safe as if you were sitting in the back room of the Authors' Club."

"As safe, but hardly as comfortable," said Scott. "A long glass of hock and seltzer would be exceedingly acceptable. But oh, Mortimer, what a chance! Think of the General's feelings when he hears that the first action of the war has been fought by the

Press column. Think of Reuter, who has been stewing at the front for a week! Think of the evening pennies just too late for the fun! By George, that slug brushed a mosquito off me!"

"And one of the donkeys is hit."

"This is sinful. It will end in our having to carry our own kits to Khartoum."

"Never mind, my boy, it all goes to make copy. I can see the headlines—'Raid on Communications': 'Murder of British Engineer': 'Press Column Attacked.' Won't it be ripping?"

"I wonder what the next line will be?" said Anerley.

"'Our Special Wounded!'" cried Scott, rolling over on to his back. "No harm done," he added, gathering himself up again; "only a chip off my knee. This is getting sultry. I confess that the idea of that back room at the Authors' Club begins to grow upon me."

"I have some diachylon."

"Afterward will do. We're having 'a 'appy day with Fuzzy on the rush.' I wish he *would* rush."

"They're coming nearer."

"This is an excellent revolver of mine if it didn't throw so devilish high. I always aim at a man's toes if I want to stimulate his digestion. O Lord, there's our kettle gone!"

With a boom like a dinner-gong a Remington bullet had passed through the kettle, and a cloud of steam hissed up from the fire. A wild shout came from the rocks above.

"The idiots think that they have blown us up. They'll rush us now, as sure as fate; then it will be our turn to lead. Got your revolver, Anerley?"

"I have this double-barrelled fowling-piece."

"Sensible man! It's the best weapon in the world at this sort of rough-and-tumble work. What cartridges?"

"Swan-shot."

"That will do all right. I carry this big bore double-barrelled pistol loaded with slugs. You might as well try to stop one of these fellows with a peashooter as with a service revolver."

"There are ways and means," said Scott. "The Geneva Convention does not hold south of the first cataract. It's easy to make a bullet mushroom by a little manipulation of the tip of it. When I was in the broken square at Tamai——"

"Wait a bit," cried Mortimer, adjusting his glasses. "I think they are coming now."

"The time," said Scott, snapping up his watch, "being exactly seventeen minutes past four."

Anerley had been lying behind a camel, staring with an interest which bordered upon fascination at the rocks opposite. Here was a little woolly puff of smoke, and there was another one, but never once had they caught a glimpse of the attackers. To him there was something weird and awesome in these unseen, persistent men who, minute by minute, were drawing closer to them. He had heard them cry out when the kettle was broken, and once, immediately afterward, an enormously strong voice had roared something which had set Scott shrugging his shoulders.

"They've got to take us first," said he, and Anerley thought his nerve might be better if he did not ask for a translation.

The firing had begun at a distance of some hundred yards, which put it out of the question for

them, with their lighter weapons, to make any reply to it. Had their antagonists continued to keep that range the defenders must either have made a hopeless sally or tried to shelter themselves behind their zareba as best they might on the chance that the sound might bring up help. But luckily for them the African had never taken kindly to the rifle, and his primitive instinct to close with his enemy is always too strong for his sense of strategy. They were drawing in, therefore, and now for the first time Anerley caught sight of a face looking at them from over a rock. It was a huge, virile, strong-jawed head of a pure negro type, with silver trinkets gleaming in the ears. The man raised a great arm from behind the rock and shook his Remington at them.

"Shall I fire?" asked Anerley.

"No, no, it is too far; your shot would scatter all over the place."

"It's a picturesque ruffian," said Scott. "Couldn't you kodak him, Mortimer? There's another!"

A fine-featured brown Arab, with a black, pointed beard, was peeping from behind another boulder. He wore the green turban which proclaimed him hadji, and his face showed the keen, nervous exaltation of the religious fanatic.

"They seem a piebald crowd," said Scott.

"That last is one of the real fighting Baggara," remarked Mortimer. "He's a dangerous man."

"He looks pretty vicious. There's another negro!"

"Two more! Dingas, by the look of them. Just the same chaps we get our own black battalions from. As long as they get a fight they don't mind who it's for; but if the idiots had only sense

enough to understand, they would know that the Arab is their hereditary enemy, and we their hereditary friends. Look at the silly juggins gnashing his teeth at the very men who put down the slave trade!"

"Couldn't you explain?"

"I'll explain with this pistol when he comes a little nearer. Now sit tight, Anerley. They're off!"

They were indeed. It was the brown man with the green turban who headed the rush. Close at his heels was the negro with the silver earrings—a giant of a man, and the other two were only a little behind. As they sprang over the rocks one after the other, it took Anerley back to the school sports when he held the tape for the hurdle-race. It was magnificent, the wild spirit and abandon of it, the flutter of the checkered galabeeahs, the gleam of steel, the wave of black arms, the frenzied faces, the quick pitter-patter of the rushing feet. The law-abiding Briton is so imbued with the idea of the sanctity of human life that it was hard for the young pressman to realise that these men had every intention of killing him, and that he was at perfect liberty to do as much for them. He lay staring as if this were a show and he a spectator.

"Now, Anerley, now! Take the Arab!" cried somebody.

He put up the gun and saw the brown fierce face at the other end of the barrel. He tugged at the trigger, but the face grew larger and fiercer with every stride. Again and again he tugged. A revolver-shot rang out at his elbow, then another one, and he saw a red spot spring out on the Arab's brown breast. But he was still coming on.

"Shoot, you ass, shoot!" screamed Scott.

Again he strained unavailingly at the trigger. There were two more pistol-shots, and the big negro had fallen and risen and fallen again.

"Cock it, you fool!" shouted a furious voice; and at the same instant, with a rush and flutter, the Arab bounded over the prostrate camel and came down with his bare feet upon Anerley's chest. In a dream he seemed to be struggling frantically with some one upon the ground, then he was conscious of a tremendous explosion in his very face, and so ended for him the first action of the war.

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"Good-bye, old chap. You'll be all right. Give yourself time." It was Mortimer's voice, and he became dimly conscious of a long-spectacled face, and of a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Sorry to leave you. We'll be lucky now if we are in time for the morning editions." Scott was tightening his girth as he spoke.

"We'll put in our wire that you have been hurt, so your people will know why they don't hear from you. If Reuter or the evening pennies come up, don't give the thing away. Abbas will look after you, and we'll be back to-morrow afternoon. Bye-bye!"

Anerley heard it all, though he did not feel energy enough to answer. Then, as he watched two sleek brown ponies with their yellow-clad riders dwindling among the rocks, his memory cleared suddenly, and he realised that the first great journalistic chance of his life was slipping away from him. It was a small fight, but it was the first of the war, and the great public at home was all athirst

for news. They would have it in the *Courier;* they would have it in the *Intelligence,* and not a word in the *Gazette.* The thought brought him to his feet, though he had to throw his arm around the stem of the palm tree to steady his swimming head.

There was the big black man lying where he had fallen, his huge chest pocked with bullet-marks, every wound rosetted with its circle of flies. The Arab was stretched out within a few yards of him, with two hands clasped over the dreadful thing which had been his head. Across him was lying Anerley's fowling-piece, one barrel discharged, the other at half-cock.

"Scott effendi shoot him your gun," said a voice. It was Abbas, his English-speaking body-servant.

Anerley groaned at the disgrace of it. He had lost his head so completely that he had forgotten to cock his gun; and yet he knew that it was not fear but interest which had so absorbed him. He put his hand up to his head and felt that a wet handkerchief was bound round his forehead.

"Where are the two other dervishes?"

"They ran away. One got shot in arm."

"What's happened to me?"

"Effendi got cut on head. Effendi catch bad man by arms, and Scott effendi shoot him. Face burn very bad."

Anerley became conscious suddenly that there was a tingling about his skin and an overpowering smell of burned hair under his nostrils. He put his hand to his moustache. It was gone. His eyebrows too? He could not find them. His head, no doubt, was very near to the dervish's when they were rolling upon the ground together, and this

was the effect of the explosion of his own gun. Well, he would have time to grow some more hair before he saw Fleet Street again. But the cut, perhaps, was a more serious matter. Was it enough to prevent him from getting to the telegraph-office at Sarras? The only way was to try and see.

But there was only that poor little Syrian grey of his. There it stood in the evening sunshine, with a sunk head and a bent knee, as if its morning's work was still heavy upon it. What hope was there of being able to do thirty-five miles of heavy going upon that? It would be a strain upon the splendid ponies of his companions—and they were the swiftest and most enduring in the country. The most enduring? There was one creature more enduring, and that was a real trotting camel. If he had had one he might have got to the wires first after all, for Mortimer had said that over thirty miles they have the better of any horse. Yes, if he had only had a real trotting camel! And then like a flash came Mortimer's words, "It is the kind of beast that the dervishes ride when they make their lightning raids."

The beasts the dervishes ride! What had these dead dervishes ridden! In an instant he was clambering up the rocks, with Abbas protesting at his heels. Had the two fugitives carried away all the camels, or had they been content to save themselves? The brass gleam from a litter of empty Remington cases caught his eye, and showed where the enemy had been crouching. And then he could have shouted for joy, for there, in the hollow, some little distance off, rose the high, graceful white neck and the elegant head of such a camel as he had never set

eyes upon before—a swan-like, beautiful creature, as far from the rough, clumsy baggles as the cart-horse is from the racer.

The beast was kneeling under the shelter of the rocks with its waterskin and bag of doora slung over its shoulders, and its forelegs tethered Arab fashion with a rope round the knees. Anerley threw his leg over the front pommel while Abbas slipped off the cord. Forward flew Anerley toward the creature's neck, then violently backward, clawing madly at anything which might save him, and then, with a jerk which nearly snapped his loins, he was thrown forward again. But the camel was on its legs now, and the young pressman was safely seated upon one of the fliers of the desert. It was as gentle as it was swift, and it stood oscillating its long neck and gazing round with its large brown eyes, whilst Anerley coiled his legs round the peg and grasped the curved camel-stick which Abbas had handed up to him. There were two bridle-cords, one from the nostril and one from the neck, but he remembered that Scott had said that it was the servant's and not the house-bell which had to be pulled, so he kept his grasp upon the lower. Then he touched the long, vibrating neck with his stick, and in an instant Abbas's farewells seemed to come from far behind him, and the black rocks and yellow sand were dancing past on either side.

It was his first experience of a trotting camel, and at first the motion, although irregular and abrupt, was not unpleasant. Having no stirrup or fixed point of any kind, he could not rise to it, but he gripped as tightly as he could with his knee, and he tried to sway backward and forward as he

had seen the Arabs do. It was a large, very concave Makloofa saddle, and he was conscious that he was bouncing about on it with as little power of adhesion as a billiard-ball upon a tea-tray. He gripped the two sides with his hands to hold himself steady. The creature had got into its long, swinging, stealthy trot, its sponge-like feet making no sound upon the hard sand. Anerley leaned back with his two hands gripping hard behind him, and he whooped the creature on.

The sun had already sunk behind the line of black volcanic peaks, which look like huge slag-heaps at the mouth of a mine. The western sky had taken that lovely light-green and pale-pink tint which makes evening beautiful upon the Nile, and the old brown river itself, swirling down amongst the black rocks, caught some shimmer of the colours above. The glare, the heat, and the piping of the insects had all ceased together. In spite of his aching head, Anerley could have cried out for pure physical joy as the swift creature beneath him flew along with him through that cool, invigorating air, with the virile north wind soothing his pringling face.

He had looked at his watch, and now he made a swift calculation of times and distances. It was past six when he had left the camp. Over broken ground it was impossible that he could hope to do more than seven miles an hour—less on bad parts, more on the smooth. His recollection of the track was that there were few smooth and many bad. He would be lucky, then, if he reached Sarras anywhere from twelve to one. Then the messages took a good two hours to go through, for they had had to be transcribed at Cairo. At the best he

could only hope to have told his story in Fleet Street at two or three in the morning. It was possible that he might manage it, but the chances seemed enormously against him. About three the morning edition would be made up, and his chance gone for ever. The one thing clear was that only the first man at the wires would have any chance at all, and Anerley meant to be first if hard riding could do it. So he tapped away at the bird-like neck, and the creature's long, loose limbs went faster and faster at every tap. Where the rocky spurs ran down to the river, horses would have to go round, while camels might get across, so that Anerley felt that he was always gaining upon his companions.

But there was a price to be paid for the feeling. He had heard of men who had burst when on camel journeys, and he knew that the Arabs swathe their bodies tightly in broad cloth bandages when they prepare for a long march. It had seemed unnecessary and ridiculous when he first began to speed over the level track, but now, when he got on the rocky paths, he understood what it meant. Never for an instant was he at the same angle. Backward, forward he swung, with a tingling jar at the end of each sway, until he ached from his neck to his knee. It caught him across the shoulders, it caught him down the spine, it gripped him over the loins, it marked the lower line of his ribs with one heavy, dull throb. He clutched here and there with his hand to try and ease the strain upon his muscles. He drew up his knees, altered his seat, and set his teeth with a grim determination to go through with it should it kill him. His head was splitting, his flayed face smarting, and every

joint in his body aching as if it were dislocated. But he forgot all that when, with the rising of the moon, he heard the clinking of horses' hoofs down upon the track by the river, and knew that, unseen by them, he had already got well abreast of his companions. But he was hardly halfway and the time already eleven.

All day the needles had been ticking away without intermission in the little corrugated iron hut which served as a telegraph station at Sarras. With its bare walls and its packing-case seats it was none the less for the moment one of the vital spots upon the earth's surface, and the crisp, importunate ticking might have come from the world-old clock of Destiny. Many august people had been at the other end of those wires, and had communed with the moist-faced military clerk. A French Premier had demanded a pledge, and an English marquis had passed on the request to the General in command, with a question as to how it would affect the situation. Cipher telegrams had nearly driven the clerk out of his wits, for of all crazy occupations the taking of a cipher message, when you are without the key to the cipher, is the worst. Much high diplomacy had been going on all day in the innermost chambers of European chancellories, and the results of it had been whispered into this little corrugated iron hut. About two in the morning an enormous despatch had come at last to an end, and the weary operator had opened the door, and was lighting his pipe in the cool, fresh air, when he saw a camel plump down in the dust, and a man, who seemed to be in the last stage of drunkenness, come rolling toward him.

"What's the time?" he cried, in a voice which appeared to be the only sober thing about him.

It was on the clerk's lips to say that it was time that the questioner was in his bed, but it is not safe upon a campaign to be ironical at the expense of kharki-clad men. He contented himself therefore with the bald statement that it was after two.

But no retort that he could have devised could have had a more crushing effect. The voice turned drunken also, and the man caught at the door-post to uphold him.

"Two o'clock! I'm done after all!" said he. His head was tied up in a bloody handkerchief, his face was crimson, and he stood with his legs crooked as if the pith had all gone out of his back. The clerk began to realise that something out of the ordinary was in the wind.

"How long does it take to get a wire to London?"

"About two hours."

"And it's two now. I could not get it there before four."

"Before three."

"Four."

"No, three."

"But you said two hours."

"Yes, but there's more than an hour's difference in longitude."

"By Heaven, I'll do it yet!" cried Anerley, and staggering to a packing-case, he began the dictation of his famous despatch.

And so it came about that the *Gazette* had a long column, with headlines like an epitaph, when the sheets of the *Intelligence* and the *Courier* were as blank as the faces of their editors. And so, too,

it happened that when two weary men, upon two foundered horses, arrived about four in the morning at the Sarras post-office they looked at each other in silence and departed noiselessly, with the conviction that there are some situations with which the English language is not capable of dealing.

THE DÉBUT OF BIMBASHI JOYCE

It was in the days when the tide of Mahdism, which had swept in such a flood from the great Lakes and Darfur to the confines of Egypt, had at last come to its full, and even begun, as some hoped, to show signs of a turn. At its outset it had been terrible. It had engulfed Hicks's army, swept over Gordon and Khartoum, rolled behind the British forces as they retired down the river, and finally cast up a spray of raiding parties as far north as Assouan. Then it found other channels to east and to west, to Central Africa and to Abyssinia, and retired a little on the side of Egypt. For ten years there ensued a lull, during which the frontier garrisons looked out upon those distant blue hills of Dongola. Behind the violet mists which draped them, lay a land of blood and horror. From time to time some adventurer went south toward those haze-girt mountains, tempted by stories of gum and ivory, but none ever returned. Once a mutilated Egyptian and once a Greek woman, mad with thirst and fear, made their way to the lines. They were the only exports of that country of darkness. Sometimes the sunset would turn those distant mists into a bank of crimson, and the dark mountains would rise from that sinister reek like islands in a sea of blood. It seemed a grim symbol in the southern heaven when seen from the fort-capped hills by Wady Halfa.

Ten years of lust in Khartoum, ten years of

silent work in Cairo, and then all was ready, and it was time for civilisation to take a trip south once more, travelling as her wont is, in an armoured train. Everything was ready, down to the last pack-saddle of the last camel, and yet no one suspected it, for an unconstitutional Government has its advantages. A great administrator had argued, and managed, and cajoled; a great soldier had organised and planned, and made piastres do the work of pounds. And then one night these two master spirits met and clasped hands, and the soldier vanished away upon some business of his own. And just at that very time Bimbashi Hilary Joyce, seconded from the Royal Mallow Fusiliers, and temporarily attached to the Ninth Soudanese, made his first appearance in Cairo.

Napoleon had said, and Hilary Joyce had noted, that great reputations are only to be made in the East. Here he was in the East with four tin cases of baggage, a Wilkinson sword, a Bond's slug-throwing pistol, and a copy of "Green's Introduction to the Study of Arabic." With such a start, and the blood of youth running hot in his veins, everything seemed easy. He was a little frightened of the General, he had heard stories of his sternness to young officers, but with tact and suavity he hoped for the best. So, leaving his effects at Shepheard's Hotel, he reported himself at headquarters.

It was not the General, but the head of the Intelligence Department who received him, the Chief being still absent upon that business which had called him. Hilary Joyce found himself in the presence of a short, thick-set officer, with a gentle voice and a placid expression which covered a re-

markably acute and energetic spirit. With that quiet smile and guileless manner he had undercut and outwitted the most cunning of Orientals. He stood, a cigarette between his fingers, looking at the newcomer.

"I heard that you had come. Sorry the Chief isn't here to see you. Gone up to the frontier, you know."

"My regiment is at Wady Halfa. I suppose, sir, that I should report myself there at once?"

"No; I was to give you your orders." He led the way to a map upon the wall, and pointed with the end of his cigarette. "You see this place. It's the oasis of Kurkur—a little quiet, I am afraid, but excellent air. You are to get out there as quick as possible. You'll find a company of the Ninth, and half a squadron of cavalry. You will be in command."

Hilary Joyce looked at the name, printed at the intersection of two black lines, without another dot upon the map for several inches around it.

"A village, sir?"

"No, a well. Not very good water, I'm afraid, but you soon get accustomed to natron. It's an important post, as being at the junction of two caravan routes. All routes are closed now, of course, but still you never know who *might* come along them."

"We are there, I presume, to prevent raiding?"

"Well, between you and me, there's really nothing to raid. You are there to intercept messengers. They must call at the wells. Of course you have only just come out, but you probably understand already enough about the condition of this country to know that there is a great deal of disaffection

about, and that the Khalifa is likely to try and keep in touch with his adherents. Then, again, Senoussi lives up that way"—he waved his cigarette to the westward—"the Khalifa might send a message to him along that route. Anyhow, your duty is to arrest every one coming along, and get some account of him before you let him go. You don't talk Arabic, I suppose?"

"I am learning, sir."

"Well, well, you'll have time enough for study there. And you'll have a native officer, Ali something or other, who speaks English, and can interpret for you. Well, good-bye—I'll tell the Chief that you reported yourself. Get on to your post now as quickly as you can."

Railway to Baliani, the post-boat to Assouan, and then two days on a camel in the Libyan Desert with an Ababdeh guide, and three baggage-camels to tie one down to their own exasperating pace. However, even two and a half miles an hour mount up in time, and at last, on the third evening, from the blackened slag-heap of a hill which is called the Jebel Kurkur, Hilary Joyce looked down upon a distant clump of palms, and thought that this cool patch of green in the midst of the merciless blacks and yellows was the fairest colour effect that he had ever seen. An hour later he had ridden into the little camp, the guard had turned out to salute him, his native subordinate had greeted him in excellent English, and he had fairly entered into his own.

It was not an exhilarating place for a lengthy residence. There was one large bowl-shaped, grassy depression sloping down to the three pits of brown and brackish water. There was the grove of palm

trees also, beautiful to look upon, but exasperating in view of the fact that Nature has provided her least shady trees on the very spot where shade is needed most. A single widespread acacia did something to restore the balance. Here Hilary Joyce slumbered in the heat, and in the cool he inspected his square-shouldered, spindle-shanked Soudanese, with their cherry black faces and their funny little pork-pie forage caps. Joyce was a martinet at drill, and the blacks loved being drilled, so the Bimbashi was soon popular among them. But one day was exactly like another. The weather, the view, the employment, the food—everything was the same. At the end of three weeks he felt that he had been there for interminable years. And then at last there came something to break the monotony.

One evening as the sun was sinking, Hilary Joyce rode slowly down the old caravan road. It had a fascination for him, this narrow track, winding among the boulders and curving up the nullahs, for he remembered how in the map it had gone on and on, stretching away into the unknown heart of Africa. The countless pads of innumerable camels through many centuries had beaten it smooth, so that now, unused and deserted, it still wound away, the strangest of roads, a foot broad, and perhaps two thousand miles in length. Joyce wondered as he rode how long it was since any traveller had journeyed up it from the south, and then he raised his eyes, and there was a man coming along the path.

For an instant Joyce thought that it might be one of his own men, but a second glance assured him that this could not be so. The stranger was

dressed in the flowing robes of an Arab, and not in the close-fitting kharki of a soldier. He was very tall, and a high turban made him seem gigantic. He strode swiftly along, with head erect, and the bearing of a man who knows no fear.

Who could he be, this formidable giant coming out of the unknown? The precursor possibly of a horde of savage spearmen. And where could he have walked from? The nearest well was a long hundred miles down the track. At any rate the frontier post of Kurkur could not afford to receive casual visitors. Hilary Joyce whisked round his horse, galloped into camp and gave the alarm. Then, with twenty horsemen at his back, he rode out again to reconnoitre.

The man was still coming on in spite of these hostile preparations. For an instant he had hesitated when first he saw the cavalry, but escape was out of the question, and he advanced with the air of one who makes the best of a bad job. He made no resistance, and said nothing when the hands of two troopers clutched at his shoulders, but walked quietly between their horses into camp. Shortly afterward the patrols came in again. There were no signs of any Dervishes. The man was alone. A splendid trotting camel had been found lying dead a little way down the track. The mystery of the stranger's arrival was explained. But why, and whence, and whither?—these were questions for which a zealous officer must find an answer.

Hilary Joyce was disappointed that there were no Dervishes. It would have been a great start for him in the Egyptian army had he fought a little action on his own account. But even as it was, he had a rare chance of impressing the author-

ities. He would love to show his capacity to the head of the Intelligence, and even more to that grim Chief who never forgot what was smart, or forgave what was slack. The prisoner's dress and bearing showed that he was of importance. Mean men do not ride pure-bred trotting camels. Joyce sponged his head with cold water, drank a cup of strong coffee, put on an imposing official tarboosh instead of his sun-helmet, and formed himself into a court of inquiry and judgment under the acacia tree.

He would have liked his people to have seen him now, with his two black orderlies in waiting, and his Egyptian native officer at his side. He sat behind a camp-table, and the prisoner, strongly guarded, was led up to him. The man was a handsome fellow, with bold grey eyes and a long black beard.

"Why!" cried Joyce, "the rascal is making faces at me."

A curious contraction had passed over the man's features, but so swiftly that it might have been a nervous twitch. He was now a model of Oriental gravity.

"Ask him who he is, and what he wants?"

The native officer did so, but the stranger made no reply, save that the same sharp spasm passed once more over his face.

"Well, I'm blessed!" cried Hilary Joyce. "Of all the impudent scoundrels! He keeps on winking at me. Who are you, you rascal? Give an account of yourself! D'ye hear?"

But the tall Arab was as impervious to English as to Arabic. The Egyptian tried again and again. The prisoner looked at Joyce with his inscrutable eyes, and occasionally twitched his face at him, but

never opened his mouth. The Bimbashi scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Look here, Mahomet Ali, we've got to get some sense out of this fellow. You say there are no papers on him?"

"No, sir; we found no papers."

"No clue of any kind?"

"He has come far, sir. A trotting camel does not die easily. He has come from Dongola, at least."

"Well, we must get him to talk."

"It is possible that he is deaf and dumb."

"Not he. I never saw a man look more all there in my life."

"You might send him across to Assouan."

"And give some one else the credit! No, thank you. This is my bird. But how are we going to get him to find his tongue?"

The Egyptian's dark eyes skirted the encampment and rested on the cook's fire.

"Perhaps," said he, "if the Bimbashi thought fit——" He looked at the prisoner and then at the burning wood.

"No, no, it wouldn't do. No, by Jove, that's going too far."

"A very little might do it."

"No, no. It's all very well here, but it would sound just awful if ever it got as far as Fleet Street. But, I say," he whispered, "we might frighten him a bit. There's no harm in that."

"No, sir."

"Tell them to undo the man's galabeeah. Order them to put a horseshoe in the fire and make it red-hot."

The prisoner watched the proceedings with an

air which had more of amusement than of uneasiness. He never winced as the black sergeant approached with the glowing shoe held upon two bayonets.

"Will you speak now?" asked the Bimbashi, savagely.

The prisoner smiled gently and stroked his beard.

"Oh, chuck the infernal thing away!" cried Joyce, jumping up in a passion. "There's no use trying to bluff the fellow. He knows we won't do it. But I *can* and I *will* flog him, and you tell him from me that if he hasn't found his tongue by to-morrow morning, I'll take the skin off his back as sure as my name's Joyce. Have you said all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you can sleep upon it, you beauty, and a good night's rest may it give you!"

He adjourned the Court, and the prisoner, as imperturbable as ever, was led away by the guard to his supper of rice and water.

Hilary Joyce was a kind-hearted man, and his own sleep was considerably disturbed by the prospect of the punishment which he must inflict next day. He had hopes that the mere sight of the koorbash and the thongs might prevail over his prisoner's obstinacy. And then, again, he thought how shocking it would be if the man proved to be really dumb after all. The possibility shook him so that he had almost determined by daybreak that he would send the stranger on unhurt to Assouan. And yet what a tame conclusion it would be to the incident! He lay upon his angareeb still debating it when the question suddenly and effectively settled itself. Ali Mahomet rushed into his tent.

"Sir," he cried, "the prisoner is gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir, and your own best riding camel as well. There is a slit cut in the tent, and he got away unseen in the early morning."

The Bimbashi acted with all energy. Cavalry rode along every track; scouts examined the soft sand of the wadys for signs of the fugitive, but no trace was discovered. The man had utterly disappeared. With a heavy heart Hilary Joyce wrote an official report of the matter and forwarded it to Assouan. Five days later there came a curt order from the Chief that he should report himself there. He feared the worst from the stern soldier, who spared others as little as he spared himself.

And his worst forebodings were realised. Travel-stained and weary, he reported himself one night at the General's quarters. Behind a table piled with papers and strewn with maps the famous soldier and his Chief of Intelligence were deep in plans and figures. Their greeting was a cold one.

"I understand, Captain Joyce," said the General, "that you have allowed a very important prisoner to slip through your fingers."

"I am sorry, sir."

"No doubt. But that will not mend matters. Did you ascertain anything about him before you lost him?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"I could get nothing out of him, sir."

"Did you try?"

"Yes, sir; I did what I could."

"What did you do?"

"Well, sir, I threatened to use physical force."

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing."

"What was he like?"

"A tall man, sir. Rather a desperate character, I should think."

"Any way by which we could identify him?"

"A long black beard, sir. Grey eyes. And a nervous way of twitching his face."

"Well, Captain Joyce," said the General, in his stern, inflexible voice, "I cannot congratulate you upon your first exploit in the Egyptian army. You are aware that every English officer in this force is a picked man. I have the whole British army from which to draw. It is necessary, therefore, that I should insist upon the very highest efficiency. It would be unfair upon the others to pass over any obvious want of zeal or intelligence. You are seconded from the Royal Mallows, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no doubt that your Colonel will be glad to see you fulfilling your regimental duties again."

Hilary Joyce's heart was too heavy for words. He was silent.

"I will let you know my final decision to-morrow morning."

Joyce saluted and turned upon his heel.

"You can sleep upon that, you beauty, and a good night's rest may it give you!"

Joyce turned in bewilderment. Where had those words been used before? Who was it who had used them?

The General was standing erect. Both he and the Chief of the Intelligence were laughing. Joyce

stared at the tall figure, the erect bearing, the inscrutable grey eyes.

"Good Lord!" he gasped.

"Well, well, Captain Joyce, we are quits!" said the General, holding out his hand. "You gave me a bad ten minutes with that infernal red-hot horseshoe of yours. I've done as much for you. I don't think we can spare you for the Royal Mallows just yet awhile."

"But, sir; but——!"

"The fewer questions the better, perhaps. But of course it must seem rather amazing. I had a little private business with the Kabbabish. It must be done in person. I did it, and came to your post in my return. I kept on winking at you as a sign that I wanted a word with you alone."

"Yes, yes. I begin to understand."

"I couldn't give it away before all those blacks, or where should I have been the next time I used my false beard and Arab dress? You put me in a very awkward position. But at last I had a word alone with your Egyptian officer, who managed my escape all right."

"He! Mahomet Ali!"

"I ordered him to say nothing. I had a score to settle with you. But we dine at eight, Captain Joyce. We live plainly here, but I think I can do you a little better than you did me at Kurkur."

A FOREIGN OFFICE ROMANCE

THERE are many folk who knew Alphonse Lacour in his old age. From about the time of the Revolution of '48 until he died in the second year of the Crimean War he was always to be found in the same corner of the Café de Provence, at the end of the Rue St. Honoré, coming down about nine in the evening, and going when he could find no one to talk with. It took some self-restraint to listen to the old diplomatist, for his stories were beyond all belief, and yet he was quick at detecting the shadow of a smile or the slightest little raising of the eyebrows. Then his huge, rounded back would straighten itself, his bull-dog chin would project, and his r's would burr like a kettle-drum. When he got as far as "Ah, monsieur r-r-r-rit!" or "Vous ne me cr-r-r-royez pas donc!" it was quite time to remember that you had a ticket for the opera.

There was his story of Talleyrand and the five oyster-shells, and there was his utterly absurd account of Napoleon's second visit to Ajaccio. Then there was that most circumstantial romance (which he never ventured upon until his second bottle had been uncorked) of the Emperor's escape from St. Helena—how he lived for a whole year in Philadelphia, while Count Herbert de Bertrand, who was his living image, personated him at Longwood. But of all his stories there was none which was more notorious than that of the Koran and the Foreign Office messenger. And yet when Mon-

sieur Otto's memoirs were written it was found that there really was some foundation for old Lacour's incredible statement.

"You must know, monsieur," he would say, "that I left Egypt after Kleber's assassination. I would gladly have stayed on, for I was engaged in a translation of the Koran, and between ourselves I had thoughts at the time of embracing Mahometanism, for I was deeply struck by the wisdom of their views about marriage. They had made an incredible mistake, however, upon the subject of wine, and this was what the Mufti who attempted to convert me could never get over. Then when old Kleber died and Menou came to the top, I felt that it was time for me to go. It is not for me to speak of my own capacities, monsieur, but you will readily understand that the man does not care to be ridden by the mule. I carried my Koran and my papers to London, where Monsieur Otto had been sent by the first Consul to arrange a treaty of peace; for both nations were very weary of the war, which had already lasted ten years. Here I was most useful to Monsieur Otto on account of my knowledge of the English tongue, and also, if I may say so, on account of my natural capacity. They were happy days during which I lived in the Square of Bloomsbury. The climate of monsieur's country is, it must be confessed, detestable. But then what would you have? Flowers grow best in the rain. One has but to point to monsieur's fellow-countrywomen to prove it.

"Well, Monsieur Otto, our Ambassador, was kept terribly busy over that treaty, and all of his staff were worked to death. We had not Pitt to deal with, which was perhaps as well for us. He

was a terrible man, that Pitt, and wherever half a dozen enemies of France were plotting together, there was his sharp-pointed nose right in the middle of them. The nation, however, had been thoughtful enough to put him out of office, and we had to do with Monsieur Addington. But Milord Hawkesbury was the Foreign Minister, and it was with him that we were obliged to do our bargaining.

"You can understand that it was no child's play. After ten years of war each nation had got hold of a great deal which had belonged to the other, or to the other's allies. What was to be given back? And what was to be kept? Is this island worth that peninsula? If we do this at Venice, will you do that at Sierra Leone? If we give up Egypt to the Sultan, will you restore the Cape of Good Hope, which you have taken from our allies the Dutch? So we wrangled and wrestled; and I have seen Monsieur Otto come back to the Embassy so exhausted that his secretary and I had to help him from his carriage to his sofa. But at last things adjusted themselves, and the night came round when the treaty was to be finally signed.

"Now you must know that the one great card which we held, and which we played, played, played at every point of the game, was that we had Egypt. The English were very nervous about our being there. It gave us a foot on each end of the Mediterranean, you see. And they were not sure that that wonderful little Napoleon of ours might not make it the base of an advance against India. So whenever Lord Hawkesbury proposed to retain anything, we had only to reply, 'In *that* case, of course, we cannot consent to evacuate Egypt,' and in this way we

quickly brought him to reason. It was by the help of Egypt that we gained terms which were remarkably favourable, and especially that we caused the English to consent to give up the Cape of Good Hope; we did not wish your people, monsieur, to have any foothold in South Africa, for history has taught us that the British foothold of one half-century is the British Empire of the next. It is not your army or your navy against which we have to guard, but it is your terrible younger son and your man in search of a career. When we French have a possession across the seas, we like to sit in Paris and to felicitate ourselves upon it. With you it is different. You take your wives and your children and you run away to see what kind of place this may be, and after that we might as well try to take that old Square of Bloomsbury away from you.

"Well, it was upon the first of October that the treaty was finally to be signed. In the morning I was congratulating Monsieur Otto upon the happy conclusion of his labours. He was a little pale shrimp of a man, very quick and nervous, and he was so delighted now at his own success that he could not sit still, but ran about the room chattering and laughing, while I sat on a cushion in the corner, as I had learned to do in the East. Suddenly, in came a messenger with a letter which had been forwarded from Paris. Monsieur Otto cast his eyes upon it, and then, without a word, his knees gave way, and he fell senseless upon the floor. I ran to him, as did the courier, and between us we carried him to the sofa. He might have been dead from his appearance, but I could still feel his heart thrilling beneath my palm.

"'What is this, then?' I asked.

"'I do not know,' answered the messenger. 'Monsieur Talleyrand told me to hurry as never man hurried before, and to put this letter into the hands of Monsieur Otto. I was in Paris at midday yesterday.'

"I know that I am to blame, but I could not help glancing at the letter, picking it out of the senseless hand of Monsieur Otto. My God! the thunderbolt that it was! I did not faint, but I sat down beside my chief and I burst into tears. It was but a few words, but they told us that Egypt had been evacuated by our troops a month before. All our treaty was undone then, and the one consideration which had induced our enemies to give us good terms had vanished. In twelve hours it would not have mattered. But now the treaty was not yet signed. We should have to give up the Cape. We should have to let England have Malta. Now that Egypt was gone we had nothing to offer in exchange.

"But we are not so easily beaten, we Frenchmen. You English misjudge us when you think that because we show emotions which you conceal, that we are therefore of a weak and womanly nature. You cannot read your histories and believe that. Monsieur Otto recovered his senses presently, and we took counsel what we should do.

"'It is useless to go on, Alphonse,' said he. 'This Englishman will laugh at me when I ask him to sign.'

"'Courage!' I cried; and then a sudden thought coming into my head—'How do we know that the English will have news of this? Perhaps they may sign the treaty before they know of it.'

"Monsieur Otto sprang from the sofa and flung himself into my arms.

"'Alphonse,' he cried, 'you have saved me! Why should they know about it? Our news has come from Toulon. to Paris, and thence straight to London. Theirs will come by sea through the straits of Gibraltar. At this moment it is unlikely that any one in Paris knows of it, save only Talleyrand and the first Consul. If we keep our secret, we may still get our treaty signed.'

"Ah, monsieur, you can imagine the horrible uncertainty in which we spent the day. Never, never shall I forget those slow hours during which we sat together, starting at every distant shout, lest it should be the first sign of the rejoicing which this news would cause in London. Monsieur Otto passed from youth to age in a day. As for me, I find it easier to go out and meet danger than to wait for it. I set forth, therefore, toward evening. I wandered here, and wandered there. I was in the fencing-rooms of Monsieur Angelo, and in the salon-de-boxe of Monsieur Jackson, and in the club of Brooks, and in the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies, but nowhere did I hear any news. Still, it was possible that Milord Hawkesbury had received it himself just as we had. He lived in Harley Street, and there it was that the treaty was to be finally signed that night at eight. I entreated Monsieur Otto to drink two glasses of Burgundy before he went, for I feared lest his haggard face and trembling hands should rouse suspicion in the English minister.

"Well, we went round together in one of the Embassy's carriages, about half-past seven. Monsieur Otto went in alone; but presently, on ex-

cuse of getting his portfolio, he came out again, with his cheeks flushed with joy, to tell me that all was well.

"'He knows nothing,' he whispered. 'Ah, if the next half-hour were over!'

"'Give me a sign when it is settled,' said I.

"'For what reason?'

"'Because until then no messenger shall interrupt you. I give you my promise—I, Alphonse Lacour.'

"He clasped my hand in both of his. 'I shall make an excuse to move one of the candles on to the table in the window,' said he, and hurried into the house, whilst I was left waiting beside the carriage.

"Well, if we could but secure ourselves from interruption for a single half-hour the day would be our own. I had hardly begun to form my plans when I saw the lights of a carriage coming swiftly from the direction of Oxford Street. Ah, if it should be the messenger! What could I do? I was prepared to kill him—yes, even to kill him, rather than at this last moment allow our work to be undone. Thousands die to make a glorious war. Why should not one die to make a glorious peace? What though they hurried me to the scaffold? I should have sacrificed myself for my country. I had a little curved Turkish knife strapped to my waist. My hand was on the hilt of it when the carriage which had alarmed me so rattled safely past me.

"But another might come. I must be prepared. Above all, I must not compromise the Embassy. I ordered our carriage to move on, and I engaged what you call a hackney coach. Then I spoke to

the driver, and gave him a guinea. He understood that it was a special service.

"'You shall have another guinea if you do what you are told,' said I.

"'All right, master,' said he, turning his slow eyes upon me without a trace of excitement or curiosity.

"'If I enter your coach with another gentleman, you will drive up and down Harley Street and take no orders from any one but me. When I get out, you will carry the other gentleman to Watier's Club in Bruton Street.'

"'All right, master,' said he again.

"So I stood outside Milord Hawkesbury's house, and you can think how often my eyes went up to that window in the hope of seeing the candle twinkle in it. Five minutes passed, and another five. Oh, how slowly they crept along! It was a true October night, raw and cold, with a white fog crawling over the wet, shining cobblestones, and blurring the dim oil-lamps. I could not see fifty paces in either direction, but my ears were straining, straining, to catch the rattle of hoofs or the rumble of wheels. It is not a cheering place, monsieur, that Street of Harley, even upon a sunny day. The houses are solid and very respectable over yonder, but there is nothing of the feminine about them. It is a city to be inhabited by males. But on that raw night, amid the damp and the fog, with the anxiety gnawing at my heart, it seemed the saddest, weariest spot in the whole wide world. I paced up and down, slapping my hands to keep them warm, and still straining my ears. And then suddenly out of the dull hum of the traffic down in Oxford Street I heard a sound detach itself, and

grow louder and louder, and clearer and clearer with every instant, until two yellow lights came flashing through the fog, and a light cabriolet whirled up to the door of the Foreign Minister. It had not stopped before a young fellow sprang out of it and hurried to the steps, while the driver turned his horse and rattled off into the fog once more.

"Ah, it is in the moment of action that I am best, monsieur. You, who only see me when I am drinking my wine in the Café de Provence, cannot conceive the heights to which I rise. At that moment, when I knew that the fruits of a ten-years' war were at stake, I was magnificent. It was the last French campaign, and I the General and army in one.

"'Sir,' said I, touching him upon the arm, 'are you the messenger for Lord Hawkesbury?'

"'Yes,' said he.

"'I have been waiting for you half an hour,' said I. 'You are to follow me at once. He is with the French Ambassador.'

"I spoke with such assurance that he never hesitated for an instant. When he entered the hackney coach and I followed him in, my heart gave such a thrill of joy that I could hardly keep from shouting aloud. He was a poor little creature, this Foreign Office messenger, not much bigger than Monsieur Otto, and I—monsieur can see my hands now, and imagine what they were like when I was seven-and-twenty years of age.

"Well, now that I had him in my coach, the question was what I should do with him. I did not wish to hurt him if I could help it.

"'This is a pressing business,' said he. 'I have a despatch which I must deliver instantly.'

"Our coach had rattled down Harley Street, but now, in accordance with my instruction, it turned and began to go up again.

"'Hello?' he cried. 'What's this?'

"'What then?' I asked.

"'We are driving back. Where is Lord Hawkesbury?'

"'We shall see him presently.'

"'Let me out!' he shouted. 'There's some trickery in this. Coachman, stop the coach! Let me out, I say!'

"I dashed him back into his seat as he tried to turn the handle of the door. He roared for help. I clapped my palm across his mouth. He made his teeth meet through the side of it. I seized his own cravat and bound it over his lips. He still mumbled and gurgled, but the noise was covered by the rattle of our wheels. We were passing the minister's house, and there was no candle in the window.

"The messenger sat quiet for a little, and I could see the glint of his eyes as he stared at me through the gloom. He was partly stunned, I think, by the force with which I had hurled him into his seat. And also he was pondering, perhaps, what he should do next. Presently he got his mouth partly free from the cravat.

"'You can have my watch and my purse if you will let me go,' said he.

"'Sir,' said I, 'I am as honourable a man as you are yourself.'

"'Who are you, then?'

"'My name is of no importance.'

"'What do want with me?'

"'It is a bet.'

"'A bet? What d'you mean? Do you understand that I am on the Government service, and that you will see the inside of a jail for this?'

"'That is the bet. That is the sport,' said I.

"'You may find it poor sport before you finish,' he cried. 'What is this insane bet of yours, then?'

"'I have bet,' I answered, 'that I will recite a chapter of the Koran to the first gentleman whom I should meet in the street.'

"I do not know what made me think of it, save that my translation was always running in my head. He clutched at the door-handle, and again I had to hurl him back into his seat.

"'How long will it take?' he gasped.

"'It depends on the chapter,' I answered.

"'A short one, then, and let me go!'

"'But is it fair?' I argued. 'When I say a chapter I do not mean the shortest chapter, but rather one which should be of average length.'

"'Help! help! help!' he squealed, and I was compelled again to adjust his cravat.

"'A little patience,' said I, 'and it will soon be over. I should like to recite the chapter which would be of most interest to yourself. You will confess that I am trying to make things as pleasant as I can for you?'

"He slipped his mouth free again.

"'Quick, then, quick!' he groaned.

"'The Chapter of the Camel?' I suggested.

"'Yes, yes.'

"'Or that of the Fleet Stallion?'

"'Yes, yes. Only proceed!'

"We had passed the window and there was no candle. I settled down to recite the Chapter of the Stallion to him.

"Perhaps you do not know your Koran very well, monsieur? Well, I knew it by heart then, as I know it by heart now. The style is a little exasperating for any one who is in a hurry. But, then, what would you have? The people in the East are never in a hurry, and it was written for them. I repeated it all with the dignity and solemnity which a sacred book demands, and the young Englishman he wriggled and groaned.

"'When the horses, standing on three feet and placing the tip of their fourth foot upon the ground, were mustered in front of him in the evening, he said, "I have loved the love of earthly good above the remembrance of things on high, and have spent the time in viewing these horses. Bring the horses back to me." And when they were brought back he began to cut off their legs and——'

"It was at this moment that the young Englishman sprang at me. My God! how little can I remember of the next few minutes! He was a boxer, this shred of a man. He had been trained to strike. I tried to catch him by the hands. Pac, pac, he came upon my nose and upon my eye. I put down my head and thrust at him with it. Pac, he came from below. But, ah! I was too much for him. I hurled myself upon him, and he had no place where he could escape from my weight. He fell flat upon the cushions, and I seated myself upon him with such conviction that the wind flew from him as from a burst bellows.

"Then I searched to see what there was with which I could tie him. I drew the strings from my shoes, and with one I secured his wrists, and with another his ankles. Then I tied the cravat round his mouth again, so that he could only lie